

# **Viewpoints Towards the Future Public Health Technician Position Among the Environmental Health Personnel**

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Bachelors of Technology in Environmental Health**

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## Abstract

The purpose of this research project was to analyze and generalize the overall viewpoints of managers as well as PHI/EHOs towards the possible future creation of the new Public Health Technician position as well as to determine any impacts of this position on the PHI/EHOs. Due to the massive baby boomer retirements, there seems to be an apparent shortage of PHIs in the health authorities across Canada. Therefore, one of the ideas being considered in order to meet the future PHI demand is the creation of a Public Health Technician (PHT) position as a follow up to the idea suggested by Dr. Richard Musto, Executive Medical Director, Calgary Health Region. For the purposes of this project, the author invited PHI/EHOs as well as managers, directors and MHOs from various health authorities across Canada to complete a 3-5 minutes survey comprising of 14 questions via e-mail. The participants were given two weeks from February 6<sup>th</sup> to February 20<sup>th</sup> 2009 to complete the survey and send in their responses. The data collected was then analyzed using a Chi-Square Test with the help of the NCSS software at a significant level of  $\alpha = 0.05$ . The Chi-square test determined that there is no association between the current status of employment of the public health personals and their belief that there is a shortage of PHIs in Canada (p-value = 0.43). The test also determined that there is no association between the current status of employment of the participants and whether or not they believed that the creation of the new PHT position would solve the problem of the perceived shortage of PHIs in Canada (p-value = 0.76). Overall, of the 77 public health personals who were surveyed, 61% believed that there is a shortage of PHIs in Canada. 91% of the participants had heard about the incoming of the PHT position and 65% believed that the creation of the technician position will not help solve this problem of shortage of PHIs in Canada. Most of them believed that increasing more awareness about the PHI profession would be a better alternative in dealing with the PHI shortage than creating a PHT position.

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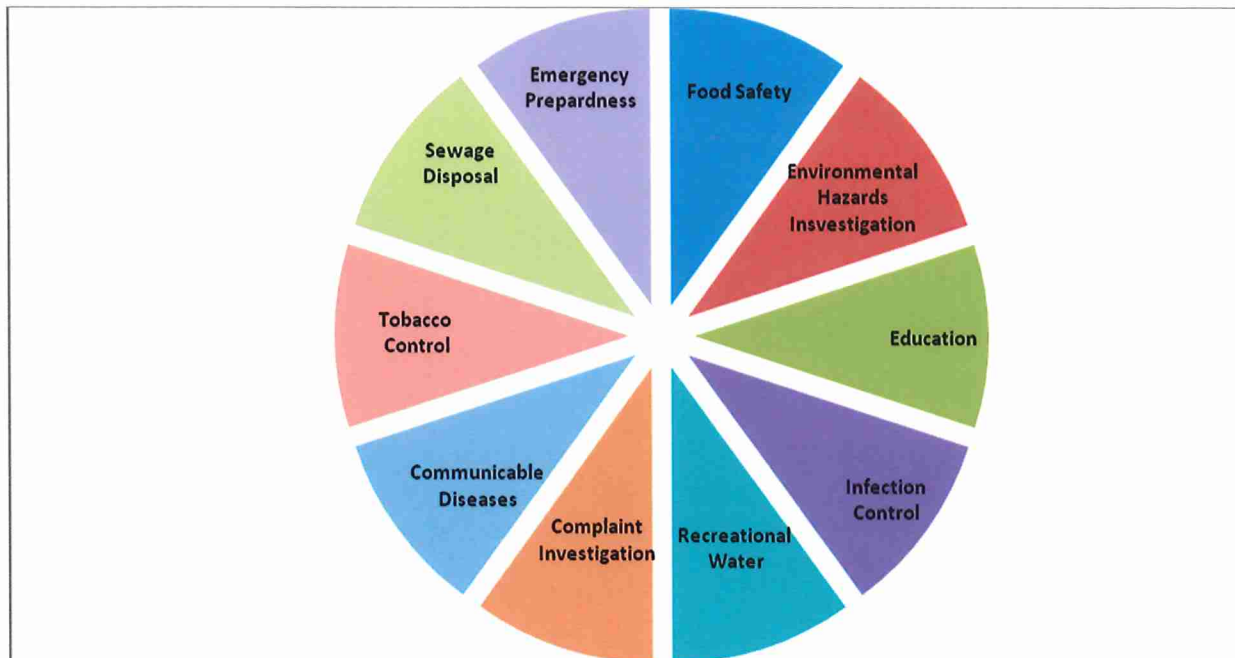
## Introduction

During the author's time of working as a student Public Health Inspector last summer, she came across the news of possibly having a new position being set up in the health authorities called the Public Health Technician Position (PHT). After chatting with some of the Public Health Inspectors, it seemed apparent that the news had mixed reviews and was received differently by different health inspectors around the health authority. Being a future health inspector herself, it seemed crucial to the author to know how the current PHI's and managers viewed the creation of this new PHT position and to examine the general consensus among them. Thus the author undertook this research project to help analyze and summarize the overall viewpoints of the managers, directors, MHOs as well as the PHI/EHOs towards the future creation of this new Public Health Technician position as well as to help determine any impacts of this position on the PHI/EHOs.

## Literature Review

One of the very crucial yet seldom heard about positions in the community health system is of a Public Health Inspector. The educational network states that Public Health Inspectors (PHI's) are the people who "safeguard the environment and health of the public by monitoring facilities and enforcing health legislation" (1). But of course this only depicts a part of their responsibilities. The city of Ottawa website (2) states more in depth the duties and responsibilities of a health inspector, some of which are depicted in Figure1.

**Figure 1. Realms of the duties and responsibilities of a health Inspector**



Thus, it is apparent that Public Health Inspectors play a vital role in making our community a better place to live in, one operator at a time! And because of their crucial role in the community, becoming a PHI entails a lot of hard work and dedication. In order to become a Public Health Officer, a candidate must have a minimum Bachelor's degree in environmental health or equivalent education (5). The B.C. public Service Agency states that in order to work as a PHI, a candidate must attain a Certificate in Public Health Inspection (Canada), C.P.H.I. (C), which is granted by the Board of Certification of the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors after the candidate passes both the oral as well as the written component of the certification procedure upon completion of a 12 week practicum at an agency acceptable to the Board of certification (6).

In order to do so, there are five different educational institutes in Canada that provide programs that are currently approved by the board. According to the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors BOC candidate information guide, these institutions are (7):

- Ryerson University, Toronto, ON
- British Columbia Institute of Technology, Burnaby, BC
- Concordia University College of Alberta, Edmonton, AB
- Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS
- *NB Community College – Bathurst, Bathurst, NB*
- First Nations University of Canada, Regina, SK

Once certified, according to the Alberta Occupational profile, the Public health Inspectors are mostly employed by the local public health authorities, however, some can be employed in the regional, provincial and national health departments, environmental and pollution control departments, sewage and water treatment plants, agencies interested in industrial health and hygiene or food sanitation, and solid waste management agencies (5).

Thus, their vast realm of input scope makes PHIs' role very important. Their roles become even more crucial now because as the economy grows, the number of operators coming into business increases, which means more places for health inspectors to inspect. Unfortunately, with the massive baby boomer retirement occurring, this seems more like a problem than good news for the health authorities. The retirements have resulted in a noticeable shortage of public health inspectors in Canada and if this continues, it might put an immense pressure on the industry to meet the needs of the public they serve. According to Mr. Domenic Losito, the regional director of Vancouver Coastal Health as well as the editor of the Environmental Health Review Magazine, employers right now are facing "a dual challenge: growth in the environmental public health infrastructure and the reality of a wave of retirements in the next five years (8)." Unlike the first one, the latter challenge is not so much a positive aspect for the health authorities. The retirements are unavoidable. So, what can be done to better the situation? Well, according to Mr. Losito there are three areas that can be concentrated on in order to fill the retirement PHI positions in the near future. Firstly, health officers need to get more students into the training programs by promoting the profession to the young people coming into the post-secondary institutions and by also ensuring that those post-secondary institutions are doing their



part in encouraging new candidates into this field (8). Secondly, health authorities need to “expand their source of qualified candidates by removing artificial barriers in accepting equivalently qualified Environmental Public health practitioners from overseas (8).”

The good news is that taking the future needs into consideration, CIPHI has already started working on these first two areas. In his editorial comments, Mr. Losito states that CIPHI has produced a new pamphlet to promote the profession. Having new and attractive pamphlets go out in the community and having our profession highlighted in the media can provide a major contribution in the public being aware of our profession. The BOC, according to Mr. Losito, has also taken initiative to look into the second area of improvement and have already reduced the practicum requirement from 26 weeks to 12 weeks for “appropriately qualified international candidates effective January 1, 2006 (8).”

The third and perhaps the most controversial area of attention in terms of meeting the future PHI demand is the creation of an Environmental/ Public Health Technician position. The idea of a PHT position is not a new one, in fact, some places in U.S. like Ulster County, New York, already have a public health technician position set up (see appendix A PHT survey additional information). According to Keir Cordner, C.P.H.I(C) B.C. branch councillor, this idea of having a technician position came about (in Canada) in the spring of 2005 when Dr. Richard Musto, Executive Medical Director, Calgary Health Region, suggested to Sharon Carry, President and CEO of Bow Valley College, that there was a need for a new technician position in the environmental public health field (9).

This Public Health Technician position, in theory, would help alleviate the increasing future demand for PHIs by taking on some of the more mundane time consuming tasks PHIs have done traditionally, but which do not require the full four years of education that PHIs receive in order

to be certified (8). Therefore, according to Mr. Losito, CIPHI should, in alliance with the National Executive Council (NEC) as well as the Board of certification, pursue the recognition and certification of the Public Health Technician position (8). However, this viewpoint does not seem to be unanimous across the board in our health authorities. Some health officials think that having a technician position is a great idea because it could help free up some valuable time for certified Environmental Public Health Professionals in order for them to concentrate more on their mandated health protection roles. On the other hand, however, other health officials think that creating a technician position might not be such a feasible idea after all. Because the Public health technician program is envisioned as a diploma level program for individuals who would like to attain a paraprofessional role, with responsibility for very specific tasks, some think it might not generate a lot of interest in the public (11).

The view points of the Environmental Health program instructors at British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) seem to be following the same train of thought. After the Public Health Technician issue was brought up in the staff/ faculty meeting on Friday, October 24<sup>th</sup>, instructors seemed to think that not very many students would want to pursue a two year diploma program just to come out with the skills to perform very specific tasks for the rest of their lives, for approximately half the amount of money that a PHI makes (12). In addition to this, the instructors also thought that Public Health Technician like positions already existed in the Environmental health field. For instance, a Tobacco Enforcement officer, who doesn't have to be a PHI to be able to do his/ her job; or various summer jobs like beach water sampling, West Nile Virus aide positions etc. that are taken up by students in the Environmental Health program (12). Therefore, based on this, it would seem that the graduating technicians would not have much work left behind for them to do.

Looking at some other professions with technician positions, the above mentioned mixed viewpoints do not come as a huge shock. For instance, consider the Pharmacists and the Pharmacy Technician Assistant positions. A nation wide shortage of pharmacists and a continuous growth of prescription medications due to increasing number of elderly has allowed the creation of the pharmacy technician position. With this growing opportunity, there comes increased responsibility. That is why many industry employers in the United States have made it mandatory for the Pharmacy Technicians to obtain a Pharmacy Technician Certification (15). This is viewed as good news by some because now the pharmacy technicians can assume responsibility for more routine tasks previously performed by pharmacists. However, it comes with challenges such as low wages for demanding job. In fact, the study done by Shane Desselle on 'job turnover intentions among the certified pharmacy technicians' found that poor salary, lack of advancement opportunity, and insufficient staffing were cited frequently as factors among those pharmacy technicians who indicated intentions to leave (16). Thus, one begins to wonder how different the future of a public health technician position would be from a pharmacy technician position.

After interviewing some of the future PHIs entering the workforce in the coming year it was observed that most of them thought of the PHT position in a negative connotation. They felt somewhat threatened by the possibility of this position and feared that the technicians might slowly start taking jobs away from PHIs and eventually might one day replace the need of PHIs altogether (13). Some felt that if major health authorities like Vancouver Coastal Health are already having budget cuts and fewer PHI positions available without a technician position in place, then having a PHT position in place would make it even worse (13). They argued that having relatively easy tasks like beach water sampling etc., incorporated into their hectic PHI schedule will in fact help keep their sanity and make their job more enjoyable (13).

However, some also thought that having a technician position might in fact help meet the inspection requirements in light of future massive retirements. In regards to PHIs being replaced by the technicians, well, since the PHTs are not mentioned in any legislation, it means that they cannot enforce/ regulate any legislation, like the PHIs can. The PHI's position is referred to in various pieces of legislations, for example the Health Act. According to Health Act, "a Public Health Inspector is an officer appointed under this Act who is the holder of a Certificate in Public Health Inspection (Canada) or an equivalent certificate issued by a competent authority and acceptable to the Board of Certification of Public Health Inspectors of the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors (4)." As per the Health Act 4(61)(1)(a)(b), a PHI has the authority to enter on or into any property and conduct an inspection for the purposes of determining compliance with the act and all the regulations that fall under the act. This authority is delegated by MHOs to the PHI via the current Health Act. It is important to note that the new BC Public Health Act that is soon to replace the current Health Act, does not even mention any designation for PHIs. This may generate a possibility in the future for MHOs to delegate their powers to health inspectors and/or public health technicians.

However, in order to address the fears of wholesale replacement of certified environmental Public Health Professionals with technicians, the BOC could easily create a national technician credential with a narrow scope of practice for the technicians(8). But, despite this, there still seems to be a worry in some future PHIs regarding the possible creation of the public health technician position.

Nevertheless, the situation in the health industry seemed a little different in Alberta couple years ago. Bow Valley received encouragement to start the PHT program from industry. So, on February 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Bow Valley received an opportunity to present and discuss the potential of

starting up a public health technician program with the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors, National Executive Council and the Board of Certification at their national meeting in Vancouver. Following this meeting, the Board decided to support a 'needs assessment' to be conducted by Bow Valley College to see if there is in fact, a need for new environmental Public Health Technician Position and diploma (9).

According to Dr. Bill Duperron, Dean of Health and Community Care at Bow Valley College, a needs assessment, or as he calls it, a 'feasibility study' was in fact conducted by the college to analyse the demand of the potential public health technician position out in the field (10). The Alberta PHIs were interviewed and asked for their opinions which showed mixed support from the industry for hiring PHTs. According to Dr. Duperron, presently, managers are only looking to hire employees with a Bachelor's in Environmental Health or equivalent. Because of this, Bow Valley has put their Public Health Technician program on hold for now. However, according to Dr. Duperron, if there is future demand from the industry, Bow Valley might consider starting the PHT program (10).

Even though the start of a Public health technician program at Bow Valley College has been shelved for the time being, it still seems prudent to survey all the environmental health personal working in the various health authorities across Canada, as the feasibility study conducted by Bow Valley was only concentrated on Alberta. Another reason is that there may be other colleges in B.C. or even across Canada that might decide to start a public health technician program in future. Therefore, this survey study, combined with the feasibility study conducted by Bow Valley, can provide a baseline for any colleges planning to start a similar program in the future by providing them with the researched data outlining the general consensus among the

public health officials. The data can also be used by organizations like CIPHI and BOC that would possibly govern the future certification of such a position.

## **Purpose of study**

The purpose of this research project was to analyze and generalize the overall viewpoints of the managers, directors, and MHOs, as well as the PHI/EHOs towards the future creation of a new Public Health Technician position as well as to determine any impacts this position may have on the PHI/EHOs profession.

## **Methodology**

- The author subscribed to a monthly subscription of survey software in order to create a professional online survey via surveymonkey.com (16).
- The survey was then sent as a link in the e-mail along with an initial e-mail/ cover letter (see appendix B) to the CIPHI BC branch.
- From there, the survey was administered to all the registered members of CIPHI falling under the category of PHI/EHOs, MHOs, Regional directors or managers working across Canada (see appendix A for a copy of the survey) via e-mail.

## **Materials required**

The above mentioned method required access to a computer with an internet connection, a monthly subscription to surveymonkey.com, and NCSS software CD. The author also required an up to date contact list for all the PHI/EHOs as well as managers working across Canada.

## Alternative Methods

Instead of conducting a self administered online survey, the author could administer the questionnaire in person or via postage mail. The subjects could also be interviewed over the phone by the author. However, the method of online surveying was chosen over the rest for the following reasons:

- Because of the vast realm of the surveying subjects (all across Canada), it is impossible for the researcher to personally meet all the subjects and interview them.
- The allotted budget for the whole research project does not allow the researcher to fly out to various health authorities to conduct her surveys.
- Because PHI/EHOs generally set their own schedules for the day, as well as because of the time zone change in the other provinces, it would be impossible to reach most of the subjects via phone at a particular time of the day.
- According to Survey design, e-mail and web page surveys are the fastest and least expensive methods out of all methods to conduct a survey (17).
- Finally, comparing the response rates of all the survey methods used by the students in the past years, it seems apparent that self administered e-mail surveys generated the most responses (18).

## Inclusion criterion for survey

All certified and uncertified Public Health Inspectors/ Environmental Health Officers as well as all the managers, supervisors, senior Public Health Inspectors, directors, and MHOs registered with CIPHI.

## **Exclusion criteria for survey**

- Environmental health personnel who are not registered members of CIPHI (because CIPHI will provide the contact list).
- Environmental health personals who are no longer working in the domain of public health, i.e., they have switched carriers.
- Environmental health personnel who are retired from the profession.

## **Reliability and Validity of measures**

Overall, taking a representative, random sample by sending out the survey to all the EHOs, managers, directors and MHOs working in Canada, helped draw more generalizable conclusions, and thus increased the external validity of the study. Also, having a sample size greater than 30 helped increase both reliability and validity of the study. The author conducted a pilot study prior to the actual study to account for any additional variables to make the research more reliable. Finally, as described under the ‘ethical consideration’ section, the study was conducted under the realm of BCIT’s Research Ethics Review Board Policies.

## **Ethical Consideration**

Because the research involved human subjects, it was crucial to account for ethical considerations while conducting the survey. Appropriate methods were used by the author to ensure that that confidentiality of the participants (i.e. their name, address, and any other information that could reveal their identity) remained protected in the conduct of research (19). Despite of this, the participants were told of the nature of the study and were given a choice to participate or not to participate (see appendix B for initial e mail and additional information



Document) (19). In order to ensure that all the necessary measures were being followed, the project fell within the jurisdiction of a committee called the BCIT Research Ethics Review Board (REB), which in this case comprised of instructors in the environmental health applied research course (19). Thus, the project was presented to the review board for analysis on any ethical implications, and after extensive analysis, it was approved by the board for implementation.

## **Pilot Study**

Before the actual project was carried out, a pilot study was conducted by the researcher in order to determine any drawbacks or errors in the study design which when amended ultimately made the study more efficient and reliable. The pilot study also helped determine the efficiency of the wording of survey questions in accurately relaying information. For the purposes of this pilot study, the survey questionnaire was manually administered to ten individuals, four of which were BCIT Environmental Health Program faculty members and the remaining were second year students enrolled in the Environmental Health/ Public Health program.

## **Statistical Analysis**

For the purposes of this project, both Excel as well as the NCSS program was used; Excel for generating generic tabular data and pie charts (20), and NCSS for performing inferential statistics on the data collected from the surveys (21). The scale of measurement for this study was based on the collection of qualitative or categorical observations. In other words, the study looked at Nominal data, some of which was dichotomous or binary in nature i.e. only two categories, for example, gender: male vs. female (19). However, some of the survey questions were multichotomous in nature i.e. more than two categories, for example, level of education: two years vs. four years vs. masters, and so on.

## Descriptive Statistics

The researcher did not measure this type of data; rather took counts of the number of observations in terms of proportions, percentages, ratios, or rates and depicted the results in the form of bar charts and pie charts (19).

## Inferential Statistics

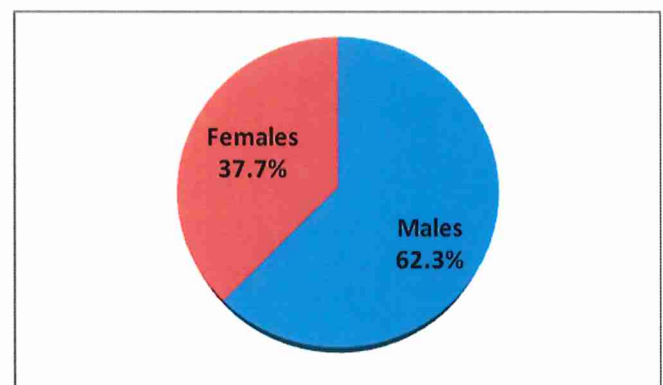
The researcher utilized the NCSS software in order to determine inferential statistics for the data collected via the survey, in order to reject or do not reject the null hypothesis. For the purposes of this survey project, the Chi- Square Test:  $X^2$  Test was used in order to conduct the inferential statistics because of the use of nominal data. The study utilized various 2\*2 form of tables in order to compare the frequencies or proportions in two or more groups (19) like comparing the current status of employment with creation of PHT position. This test was used to determine whether or not there was as association or difference in proportions between the out come in two or more groups (19). In order to do this, the researcher formulated mini hypothesis based on two questions from the survey sheet, and then used the Chi-Square test to reject or not reject the null hypothesis. Thus several Chi- Square tests were conducted using different variables every time (19).

## Results

### Characteristics of the participants:

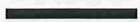




Of the 77 responders who completed the survey, 48 were male participants and 29 female participants (see Figure2). Figure 3 depicts distribution of the

**Figure 2. Percentages of male and female participants in the survey**



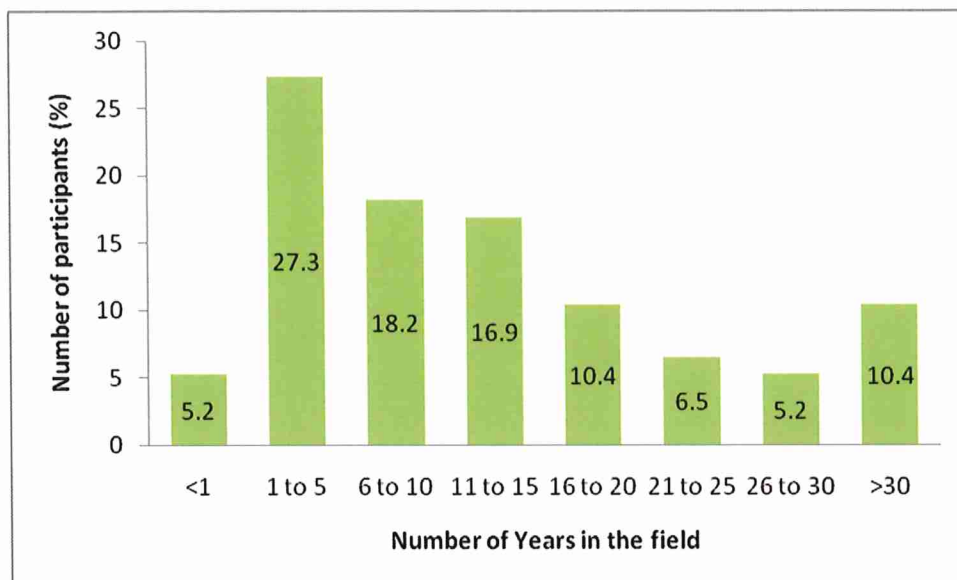
participants based on their age. The age categories ranged from 20-29 years old to >60 years old. Majority of the responders, about 81%, fell below the age of 49 years old. However, out of the 77 responses, most of the responses (~30%) came from the participants between 40-49 years of age.

**Figure 3. Response rate of participants based on their age categories**

		Response Percent	Response Count
20-29 years		24.7%	19
30-39 years		26.0%	20
40-49 years		29.9%	23
50-59 years		15.6%	12
>60 years		3.9%	3

As depicted in Figure 4, most of the responses came from public health personals working in the field for 1 to 5 years. However, majority of the participants (~62%) had been in the field from anywhere between 1 to 15 years. British Columbia and Ontario were the two provinces that generated the most responses with 43% each, whereas Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Newfoundland together made up a response rate of 14 %. Unfortunately, there was no response generated by the remaining provinces.

**Figure 4. Participation in the survey based on the number of years in the field**



Various hypotheses were generated by combining different variables from the survey questionnaire. These hypotheses were then tested by performing chi-squared tests on the NCSS program. For instance, in order to see if there was an association between the current status of employment of the participants and whether or not they believed that there was a shortage of PHIs in Canada the chi-squared test was performed to test the following hypothesis:

$H_0$ : There is no association between the current status of employment of the public health personals and the belief that there is a shortage of PHIs in Canada.

$H_a$ : There is an association between the current status of employment of the public health personals and the belief that there is a shortage of PHIs in Canada. Table 1 summarizes the results of the cross-tabulation between the two variables.

**Table 1. Cross-tabulation between the participants' status of employment and their belief of whether or not there is a shortage of PHIs in Canada**

Do you believe that there is a shortage of Public Health Inspectors in Canada?					
	What is your current status of employment?				
	Regional Director	Managerial Position (Senior PHI, Specialist or Manager)	Certified PHI	Other	Response Totals
Yes	50.0%	84.6%	53.7%	80.0%	60.8%
No	50.0%	7.7%	27.8%	20.0%	24.3%
Do not know					14.9%

The cross tabulation report generated by the chi-squared test (see appendix C, cross-tabulation report 1) revealed the p-value to be 0.43. Since the p-value was greater than 0.05, the results were not statistically significant, thus, the  $H_0$  was not rejected. Therefore, it was concluded that there is no association between the current status of employment of the public health personals and the belief that there is a shortage of PHIs in Canada. Interestingly, Table 1 depicts that 61% of the total participants agreed that there is a shortage of PHIs in Canada, whereas, 25% believed otherwise. The remaining 15% did not know whether or not there is a shortage.

A similar, chi-squared test was used to determine if there was an association between the current status of employment of the participants and whether or not they believed that the creation of the new PHT position would solve the problem of the perceived shortage of PHIs in Canada. The test determined that there was in fact no association between the two variables because the p-value = 0.76 was greater than 0.05 (see appendix C cross-tabulation report 2). Table 2 depicts that the majority (65%) of the participants believed that the creation of the PHT position will not help solve the problem, whereas, only 20% believed that it will help solve the problem.

Since in both Chi-squared tests, the p-value was greater than 0.05,  $\alpha$  error was not an issue because it generally occurs when the findings are statistically significant and the p value is

close to less than 0.05 (19).  $\beta$  error, however, generally occurs when there is failure to reject the null hypothesis when the alternative is true i.e. when p-value is greater than 0.05 (19). Therefore, it is the  $\beta$  error that is of a concern here for both the chi-squared tests. Perhaps there really was an association between the two variables in the tests, but the sample size was too small to detect it. Thus, the  $\beta$  error could have been reduced by increasing the sample size of the study (19). Unfortunately, the NCSS print out of the Chi-Square Test does not depict the ‘power’ of the survey study.

**Table 2. Cross-tabulation between the participants’ status of employment and their belief of whether or not the creation of PHT position will solve the problem**

Do you think that creation of the PHT position will help solve the problem of a perceived shortage of PHIs in Canada?					
	What is your current status of employment?				
	Regional Director	Managerial Position (Senior PHI, Specialist or Manager)	Certified PHI	Other	Response Totals
Yes	---	23.1%	18.5%	40.0%	20.0%
No	100.0%	61.5%	66.7%	40.0%	65.3%
Do not know	---	15.4%	14.8%	20.0%	14.7%

Finally, using some qualitative categories in the survey questionnaire (see survey in appendix A), the following results were obtained. For instance, ‘increasing more awareness about the Public Health Inspector position’ was the number one choice when asked what the participants believed would be a better alternative to creating a PHT position. Most of the responders believed that the creation of the PHT position would not help meet the increasing PHI demand or help reserve PHIs’ skills for situations that in fact require PHI training (see cross tabulation of survey in appendix C). Interestingly, majority (54%) of the personals in managerial positions believed that creating a PHT position will help alleviate heavy work load of the PHIs. However, most of the Certified PHIs did not seem agree with this. Overall, the top three jobs that

the participants believed can be performed by a PHT were recreational water sampling, drinking water sampling and tobacco control, respectively. Reduction in the PHI positions was considered as the major impact by both managerial personals as well as the certified PHIs due to the incoming of the technician position.

## Discussion

As seen in the cross tabulation report (CTR) in appendix C, 66% of the environmental health personals, including regional directors, managers, and PHIs, believed that creation of the public health technician position will not help solve the problem of a perceived shortage of public health inspectors in Canada. In fact, the majority of them believed that the possible creation of a technician position will have negative impacts on the public health inspector's profession (see appendix C CTR). Interestingly, the view of future PHIs as mentioned in the literature review coincides with the viewpoints of the veterans in the profession. Both groups fear that the formation of a technician position might bring along with it a monotonous work schedule for those presently working in the field as well as reduced PHI positions for those aspiring to be a part of the field.

As mentioned in the literature review, the feasibility/ needs assessment study conducted by the Bow Valley College, Alberta determined poor demand for public health technicians among the environmental health personals in Alberta (10). The researcher's survey study significantly supports the results of the Bow Valley College feasibility study by obtaining similar results not only in Alberta but also in other provinces like British Columbia, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland. The researcher's survey results help provide additional information relative to the needs assessment study by determining that 61% of the environmental health personals across Canada agree that there is a shortage of PHIs in the field (appendix C,

CTR), however, despite this eminent shortage, creating a technician position is not a desirable solution among those surveyed, regardless of their status of employment. This conclusion is supported by the results of the inferential statistical analysis. The p-value of 0.76 helped determine that there was no association between the current status of employment and their belief that creation of a PHT will help solve the problem of perceived shortage of PHIs in Canada. The survey suggested similarities between the future of PHTs and the pharmacy technicians as indicated by Shane Desselle in his study on 'job turnover intentions among the certified pharmacy technicians (16)'.

The survey also helped determine that most of the environmental health practitioners across Canada supported some of the key suggestions made by Mr. Losito to compensate for the future PHI retirements. A significant amount of responses (76%) from the survey subjects supported Mr. Losito's idea of increasing more awareness about the PHI position and about 71% of responses suggested support towards the idea of recruiting more post-secondary students into an existing environmental health program (see appendix C, CTR). The survey determined that 45% of the respondents favoured Mr. Losito's second suggestion of accepting equivalently qualified public health practitioners from overseas. Interestingly, these suggestions were selected as being better alternatives over Mr. Losito's third suggestion of introducing a Public health technician position (see appendix A, survey).

Finally, the results obtained from this study not only help reinforce the outcome of the needs assessment study done by Bow Valley college, Alberta, but also help provide a baseline for any colleges planning to start a similar program in the future. This information can be used by organizations like CIPHI and BOC in order to determine their scope and involvement in governing the future of such a position.



## Limitations

Some of the limitations that should be considered when reviewing the findings from this study are: 1) the survey was not administered directly by the author to the subjects and therefore, any failure deliveries of e- mails could not be monitored by the author. 2) The author was not able to collect any responses from MHOs (the survey only went out to MHOs registered with CIPHI) thus, the author was not able to evaluate whether there was any difference in opinion in dealing with the PHI shortage among the MHOs and the certified PHIs. 3) Finally, it must be noted that the study was only based on the results obtained from the 77 responders who completed the online survey from across Canada.

## Conclusion

It can be concluded by the results of this study that there is no association between the current status of employment of the public health personals and their belief that there is a shortage of PHIs in Canada (p-value = 0.43). There is also no association between the current status of employment of the participants and whether or not they believed that the creation of the new PHT position would solve the problem of the perceived shortage of PHIs in Canada (p-value = 0.76). These results are informative because they depict that even though 61% of the subjects considered that there is a shortage of PHIs in Canada, majority of them believed that the creation of the technician position would not help solve the problem, but increasing more awareness about the PHI profession would be a better alternative to deal with the future shortage of PHIs.

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# Appendix A

## Student Environmental Health Officer Survey

[Exit this survey >>](#)

### 1. Demographics Page

Please answer the following nonspecific demographic questions regarding your experience as a EHO/PHI:

**\*1. What is your Gender?**

- Male
- Female

**\*2. What is your current status of employment?**

**\*3. Which province do you work in?**

**4. Which Health Authority/Health Unit? (Optional)**

**5. Would you consider your health authority mainly rural or mainly urban?**

- Urban
- Rural

**\*6. How long have you been working in the field for?**

**\*7. What age category do you belong to?**

**\*8. Do you plan to retire in the next 5-10 years?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

**\*9. What is the highest level of your education?**

**\*10. Which Canadian educational institution did you attend to attain your Environmental Health degree/diploma**

**\*11. I have read and understand the research consent form. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary, and that I may withdraw at any time for any reason. I am aware that I can ask questions at any time of this study, and that my personal information will be kept strictly confidential.**

- I agree to participate
- I do not wish to participate

The Demographics section is complete. Please continue to the Raw Food Diet survey

[Next >>](#)

## Student Environmental Health Officer Survey

[Exit this survey >>](#)**4. Public Health Technician Section**

The Public Health Technician survey starts here.

**25. Do you believe that there is a shortage of Public Health Inspectors in Canada?**

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

**26. Have you heard about the possibility of a Public Health Technician position being created in the near future?**

- Yes
- No

If yes, please proceed to the next question. If no, please click on the following link to get more information about the Technician position and answer the remaining questions. [click here](#)

**27. Do you think that creation of the Public Health Technician (PHT) position will help solve the problem of a perceived shortage of PHIs in Canada?**

- Yes
- No
- Do Not Know

Additional comments:

**28. What do you think would be a better alternative to creating a PHT position? (check all that apply)**

- Hiring more PHIs
- Increasing more awareness about the Public Health Inspector Position
- Help recruit more post-secondary students into an existing environmental health program offered in Canada
- Efficient accepting of equivalently qualified Environmental Public Health practitioners

from overseas

- Passing on some of the PHI duties to the city officials (e.g. bylaw officers)
- None of the above
- Other (please specify)

**29. What positive effects, if any, do you believe the creation of the Public Health Technician position may have? (check all that apply)**

- Help meet the increasing PHI demand in the industry
- Help alleviate heavy work load of the PHIs
- Help reserve PHIs' skills for situations that in fact require PHI training
- None of the above
- Other (please specify)

**30. What types of jobs do you think can be performed by a PHT? (check all that apply)**

- recreational water sampling
- drinking water sampling
- Tobacco Control
- Noise Measurements
- Air Quality Measurements
- None of the above
- Other (please specify)

**31. What impacts, if any, do you believe the creation of the Public Health Technician Position may have on the Public Health Inspectors' profession? (check all that apply)**

## PUBLIC HEALTH TECHNICIAN SURVEY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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### Public Health Technician (PHT)

Possibly a diploma level program for individuals who would like to attain a paraprofessional role with responsibility for specific tasks which are currently included in the responsibilities of a Public Health Inspector but do not necessarily require the full four years of education that PHIs receive in order to be certified.

An excerpt from Ulster County, New York, Public Health Technician Recruitment Announcement document:

“As a Public Health Technician, an employee assists Public Health Sanitarians and Public Health Engineers in carrying out various elements of prevention and control programs affecting the public's health. The duties of this position include inspection of food service establishments, water supply systems, camping sites, motels, hotels, bathing beaches, swimming pools, etc., to ensure compliance with applicable New York State and Ulster County Sanitary Codes as well as the Environmental Conservation Law and Regulation requirements. Depending on assignments, the work is performed under general or direct supervision of a higher level employee. Does related work as required.” <http://www.co.ulster.ny.us/personnel/507012007.html>

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# Appendix B

## • Initial e-mail/ Cover Letter

Survey Link:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qL2BLqQ18W1CKOoe3AkP2Q\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qL2BLqQ18W1CKOoe3AkP2Q_3d_3d)

*To whom it may concern,*

*You are being invited to participate in a group of three studies conducted by Merima Kostecki, Gurleen Bhatia, and Bobby Sidhu, students currently attending BCIT's Environmental Health Program:*

*Study 1: Survey of Public Health Inspectors' Awareness about the Raw Food Diet, by Merima Kostecki*

*Study 2: Environmental Health Officers and their Perception of their Respective Health Authorities State of Emergency Preparedness within Canada: A Survey Based Study, by Bobby Sidhu*

*Study 3: A Survey Based Study on Viewpoints towards the Future Public Health Technician Position among the Environmental Health personnel, by Gurleen Bhatia*

*For the purposes of these studies, both management personnel as well as PHI/EHOs across Canada are being surveyed. Attached is a link to the survey consisting of a few demographic questions followed by 20 studies related questions. This will take approximately 8-10 minutes of your time. Your input is very valuable and crucial in order to obtain an accurate representation of various viewpoints regarding the three research projects. As an incentive for participating, you can enter your email address in a draw for a chance to win prizes worth over \$150.00. Your responses will remain anonymous at all times and the information collected will solely be used for the purposes of the research projects. It will not be distributed further to any third party. You can opt out of the survey at any time if you wish to do so.*

*Thank you for your participation. Please feel free to contact the principal investigators for results after the study is completed. Projected completion date of the studies is February 20, 2009. For further information please see the attached file.*

*Best Regards,*

*Principal Investigators:*

*Merima Kostecki (merima\_k@hotmail.com)*

*Gurleen Bhatia (gbhatia1@my.bcit.ca)*

*Bobby Sidhu (jsidhu25@my.bcit.ca)*

*Survey Link:*

*[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qL2BLqQ18W1CKOoe3AkP2Q\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qL2BLqQ18W1CKOoe3AkP2Q_3d_3d)*

## • Additional Information Document

### INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE / RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Survey Of Public Health Inspectors' Awareness  
About The Raw Food Diet by Merima Kostecki

Environmental Health Officers and Their Perception of their Respective Health Authorities State of  
Emergency Preparedness Within Canada: A Survey Based Study by Bobby Sidhu

Viewpoints towards the Future Public Health Technician Position among the Environmental Health  
personnel by Gurleen Bhatia

Principal Investigators: Merima Kostecki [merima\\_k@hotmail.com](mailto:merima_k@hotmail.com)

Gurleen Bhatia [gghatia1@my.bcit.ca](mailto:gghatia1@my.bcit.ca)

Bobby Sidhu [jsidhu25@my.bcit.ca](mailto:jsidhu25@my.bcit.ca)

Study Coordinators: Helen Heacock [helen\\_heacock@bcit.ca](mailto:helen_heacock@bcit.ca)

Vince Chiodo [vchiodo@bcit.ca](mailto:vchiodo@bcit.ca)

### **INVITATION**

You are being invited to participate in a group of three studies conducted by Merima Kostecki, Gurleen Bhatia and Bobby Sidhu, students currently attending BCIT's Environmental Health Program. Your involvement is very important so please take the time to read the following information, and feel free to contact any one of us or the study coordinators if anything is unclear or if you would like more information.

#### **What is the purpose of proposed Research?**

The first is a survey of all PHIs in Canada about their awareness and attitudes towards the raw food diet. Canada is home to many who follow the raw food diet, and restaurants offering a raw food menu are also emerging. With this new trend in food preparation, PHIs play a major role in facilitating the education and supervision required to ensure that this diet is followed safely both at home and in food service establishments. The analysis of surveys will provide insight into PHIs attitudes towards the raw food diet based on PHI's age, sex, educational background, and amount of field experience.

The second research project is to assess PHI's with regards to emergency preparedness. Environmental health officers can be important first and second line responders who work to protect the health of the public by ensuring safe drinking water and food as well as managing waste disposal and other environmental health issues. The purpose of this study is to assess the confidence of EHO/PHI's when dealing with emergency situations and associated challenges.

The third research project is a survey of both management personnel as well as the PHI/EHOs across Canada in order to analyze and generalize their overall viewpoints towards the future creation of a new

# Appendix C

## Cross Tabulation Report 1

Page/Date/Time 2 3/6/2009 11:48:53 AM  
 Database C:\Documents and Settings\Administrator\Desktop\gb.S0

### Counts Section

shortage	current_status				Total
	0	1	3	4	
1	4	1	10	28	43
2	1	1	1	15	18
3	0	0	1	10	11
<b>Total</b>	5	2	12	53	72

The number of rows with at least one missing value is 49

### Expected Counts Assuming Independence Section

shortage	current_status				Total
	0	1	3	4	
1	3.0	1.2	7.2	31.7	43.0
2	1.3	0.5	3.0	13.3	18.0
3	0.8	0.3	1.8	8.1	11.0
<b>Total</b>	5.0	2.0	12.0	53.0	72.0

The number of rows with at least one missing value is 49

### Combined Report

Counts, Row Pct, Column Pct, Table Pct, Expected, Chi-Square, Deviation, Residual

shortage	current_status				Total	
	0	1	3	4		
1	4	1	10	28	43	
	9.3	2.3	23.3	65.1	100.0	
	80.0	50.0	83.3	52.8	59.7	
	5.6	1.4	13.9	38.9	59.7	
	3.0	1.2	7.2	31.7	43.0	
	0.34	0.03	1.12	0.42	1.91	
	1.01	-0.19	2.83	-3.65	0.00	
	0.59	-0.18	1.06	-0.65	0.00	
	2	1	1	1	15	18
		5.6	5.6	5.6	83.3	100.0
20.0		50.0	8.3	28.3	25.0	
1.4		1.4	1.4	20.8	25.0	
1.3		0.5	3.0	13.3	18.0	
0.05		0.50	1.33	0.23	2.11	
-0.25		0.50	-2.00	1.75	0.00	
-0.22		0.71	-1.15	0.48	0.00	
3		0	0	1	10	11
		0.0	0.0	9.1	90.9	100.0
	0.0	0.0	8.3	18.9	15.3	
	0.0	0.0	1.4	13.9	15.3	
	0.8	0.3	1.8	8.1	11.0	
	0.76	0.31	0.38	0.45	1.90	
	-0.76	-0.31	-0.83	1.90	0.00	
	-0.87	-0.55	-0.62	0.67	0.00	

<b>Total</b>	5	2	12	53	72
	6.9	2.8	16.7	73.6	100.0
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	6.9	2.8	16.7	73.6	100.0
	5.0	2.0	12.0	53.0	72.0
	1.15	0.84	2.83	1.10	5.92
	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

The number of rows with at least one missing value is 49

### Cross Tabulation Report

Page/Date/Time 3 3/6/2009 11:48:53 AM

Database C:\Documents and Settings\Administrator\Desktop\gb.S0

#### Chi-Square Statistics Section

Chi-Square 5.927430

Degrees of Freedom 6

Probability Level 0.431368

Accept Ho

WARNING: At least one cell had an expected value less than 5.

**Cross Tabulation Report 2**

Page/Date/Time 2 2/26/2009 10:26:41 AM  
 Database

**Counts Section**

solve_problem	current_status				Total
	0	1	3	4	
1	2	0	2	10	14
2	2	3	8	36	49
3	1	0	2	8	11
<b>Total</b>	5	3	12	54	74

The number of rows with at least one missing value is 1

**Expected Counts Assuming Independence Section**

solve_problem	current_status				Total
	0	1	3	4	
1	0.9	0.6	2.3	10.2	14.0
2	3.3	2.0	7.9	35.8	49.0
3	0.7	0.4	1.8	8.0	11.0
<b>Total</b>	5.0	3.0	12.0	54.0	74.0

The number of rows with at least one missing value is 1

**Combined Report**

Counts, Row Pct, Column Pct, Table Pct, Expected, Chi-Square, Deviation, Residual

solve_problem	current_status				Total
	0	1	3	4	
1	2	0	2	10	14
	14.3	0.0	14.3	71.4	100.0
	40.0	0.0	16.7	18.5	18.9
	2.7	0.0	2.7	13.5	18.9
	0.9	0.6	2.3	10.2	14.0
	1.17	0.57	0.03	0.00	1.77
	1.05	-0.57	-0.27	-0.22	0.00
	1.08	-0.75	-0.18	-0.07	0.00
2	2	3	8	36	49
	4.1	6.1	16.3	73.5	100.0
	40.0	100.0	66.7	66.7	66.2
	2.7	4.1	10.8	48.6	66.2
	3.3	2.0	7.9	35.8	49.0
	0.52	0.52	0.00	0.00	1.04
	-1.31	1.01	0.05	0.24	0.00
	-0.72	0.72	0.02	0.04	0.00
3	1	0	2	8	11
	9.1	0.0	18.2	72.7	100.0
	20.0	0.0	16.7	14.8	14.9
	1.4	0.0	2.7	10.8	14.9
	0.7	0.4	1.8	8.0	11.0
	0.09	0.45	0.03	0.00	0.57
	0.26	-0.45	0.22	-0.03	0.00
	0.30	-0.67	0.16	-0.01	0.00



<b>Total</b>	5	3	12	54	74
	6.8	4.1	16.2	73.0	100.0
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	6.8	4.1	16.2	73.0	100.0
	5.0	3.0	12.0	54.0	74.0
	1.78	1.54	0.06	0.00	3.38
	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

The number of rows with at least one missing value is 1

# Cross Tabulation Report

[www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)



survey title:

**Student Environmental Health**

**Officer Survey** [Edit Title](#)

[design survey](#)

[collect responses](#)

[analyze results](#)

[View Summary](#)

current report: [Default Report](#) [Add Report](#)

[Browse Responses](#)



### Response Summary

[Filter Responses](#)

[Crosstab Responses](#)

Active Crosstab: Gurleen: status of employment

Total: 77

[Edit Crosstab](#)

[Download Responses](#)

Crosstabbed: 77

[Unapply Crosstab](#)

[Share Responses](#)

Select a page to view below or [view all pages](#):

<< [#4. Public Health Technician ...](#) >>

Page: **Public Health Technician Section**

**25. Do you believe that there is a shortage of Public Health Inspectors in Canada?**

What is your current status of employment?

	Regional Director	Managerial Position (Senior PHI, Specialist or Manager)	Certified Public Health Inspector	Other (please specify)	Response Totals
Yes	50.0% (1)	84.6% (11)	53.7% (29)	80.0% (4)	60.8% (45)
No	50.0% (1)	7.7% (1)	27.8% (15)	20.0% (1)	24.3% (18)
Do not know	0.0% (0)	7.7% (1)	18.5% (10)	0.0% (0)	14.9% (11)
<b>answered question</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>74</b>
				<b>skipped question</b>	<b>3</b>

**26. Have you heard about the possibility of a Public Health Technician position being created in the near future?**

What is your current status of employment?

	Regional Director	Managerial Position (Senior PHI, Specialist or Manager)	Certified Public Health Inspector	Other (please specify)	Response Totals
Yes	100.0% (3)	92.3% (12)	88.9% (48)	100.0% (5)	90.7% (68)
No	0.0% (0)	7.7% (1)	11.1% (6)	0.0% (0)	9.3% (7)
<b>answered question</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>75</b>
					<b>skipped question</b> 2

**27. Do you think that creation of the Public Health Technician (PHT) position will help solve the problem of a perceived shortage of PHIs in Canada?**

What is your current status of employment?

	Regional Director	Managerial Position (Senior PHI, Specialist or Manager)	Certified Public Health Inspector	Other (please specify)	Response Totals
Yes	0.0% (0)	23.1% (3)	18.5% (10)	40.0% (2)	20.0% (15)
No	100.0% (3)	61.5% (8)	66.7% (36)	40.0% (2)	65.3% (49)
Do Not Know	0.0% (0)	15.4% (2)	14.8% (8)	20.0% (1)	14.7% (11)
Additional comments:	1 <input type="button" value="view"/>	3 <input type="button" value="view"/>	12 <input type="button" value="view"/>	5 <input type="button" value="view"/>	21
<b>answered question</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>75</b>
					<b>skipped question</b> 2

**28. What do you think would be a better alternative to creating a PHT position? (check all that apply)**

**What is your current status of employment?**

	<b>Regional Director</b>	<b>Managerial Position (Senior PHI, Specialist or Manager)</b>	<b>Certified Public Health Inspector</b>	<b>Other (please specify)</b>	<b>Response Totals</b>
Hiring more PHIs	100.0% (3)	38.5% (5)	57.4% (31)	40.0% (2)	54.7% (41)
Increasing more awareness about the Public Health Inspector Position	66.7% (2)	84.6% (11)	75.9% (41)	60.0% (3)	76.0% (57)
Help recruit more post-secondary students into an existing environmental health program offered in Canada	66.7% (2)	76.9% (10)	72.2% (39)	40.0% (2)	70.7% (53)
Efficient accepting of equivalently qualified Environmental Public Health practitioners from overseas	66.7% (2)	69.2% (9)	38.9% (21)	40.0% (2)	45.3% (34)
Passing on some of the PHI duties to the city officials (e.g. bylaw officers)	0.0% (0)	15.4% (2)	13.0% (7)	0.0% (0)	12.0% (9)
None of the above	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Other (please specify)	33.3% (1) <input type="button" value="view"/>	23.1% (3) <input type="button" value="view"/>	22.2% (12) <input type="button" value="view"/>	60.0% (3) <input type="button" value="view"/>	25.3% (19)
<b>answered question</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>75</b>
					<b>skipped question 2</b>

**29. What positive effects, if any, do you believe the creation of the Public Health Technician position may have? (check all that apply)**

What is your current status of employment?

	Regional Director	Managerial Position (Senior PHI, Specialist or Manager)	Certified Public Health Inspector	Other (please specify)	Response Totals
Help meet the increasing PHI demand in the industry	0.0% (0)	30.8% (4)	17.0% (9)	40.0% (2)	20.3% (15)
Help alleviate heavy work load of the PHIs	33.3% (1)	53.8% (7)	26.4% (14)	60.0% (3)	33.8% (25)
Help reserve PHIs' skills for situations that in fact require PHI training	0.0% (0)	38.5% (5)	37.7% (20)	80.0% (4)	39.2% (29)
None of the above	66.7% (2)	30.8% (4)	49.1% (26)	20.0% (1)	44.6% (33)
Other (please specify)	0.0% (0) <input type="button" value="view"/>	15.4% (2) <input type="button" value="view"/>	13.2% (7) <input type="button" value="view"/>	0.0% (0) <input type="button" value="view"/>	12.2% (9)
<b>answered question</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>74</b>
					<b>skipped question 3</b>

**30. What types of jobs do you think can be performed by a PHT? (check all that apply)**

What is your current status of employment?

	Regional Director	Managerial Position (Senior PHI, Specialist or Manager)	Certified Public Health Inspector	Other (please specify)	Response Totals
recreational water sampling	33.3% (1)	76.9% (10)	57.4% (31)	100.0% (5)	62.7% (47)

drinking water sampling	33.3% (1)	76.9% (10)	51.9% (28)	100.0% (5)	58.7% (44)
Tobacco Control	33.3% (1)	69.2% (9)	46.3% (25)	40.0% (2)	49.3% (37)
Noise Measurements	33.3% (1)	38.5% (5)	38.9% (21)	40.0% (2)	38.7% (29)
Air Quality Measurements	33.3% (1)	38.5% (5)	27.8% (15)	20.0% (1)	29.3% (22)
None of the above	33.3% (1)	15.4% (2)	27.8% (15)	0.0% (0)	24.0% (18)
Other (please specify)	33.3% (1) <input type="button" value="view"/>	30.8% (4) <input type="button" value="view"/>	14.8% (8) <input type="button" value="view"/>	0.0% (0) <input type="button" value="view"/>	17.3% (13)
<b>answered question</b>	3	13	54	5	75
			<b>skipped question</b>	2	

**31. What impacts, if any, do you believe the creation of the Public Health Technician Position may have on the Public Health Inspectors' profession? (check all that apply)**

What is your current status of employment?

	Regional Director	Managerial Position (Senior PHI, Specialist or Manager)	Certified Public Health Inspector	Other (please specify)	Response Totals
Reduction in the PHI positions	100.0% (3)	76.9% (10)	73.1% (38)	100.0% (5)	76.7% (56)
Competition for job openings	0.0% (0)	38.5% (5)	42.3% (22)	40.0% (2)	39.7% (29)
Reduction in variety of work for PHIs i.e. monotonous work schedule	33.3% (1)	61.5% (8)	67.3% (35)	100.0% (5)	67.1% (49)
None of the above	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	5.8% (3)	0.0% (0)	4.1% (3)
	33.3% (1)	30.8% (4)	32.7% (17)	20.0% (1)	

specify)					(23)
<b>answered question</b>	3	13	52	5	<b>73</b>
					<b>skipped question 4</b>

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