**Nuisances**

**Capacity Assessment Review Findings**

In the fall of 2022, the Office of Local and Regional Health conducted a Capacity Assessment of local health departments in Massachusetts to evaluate local public health's current ability to provide basic public health services based on their available resources, including staffing levels, funding, and training. The first-ever Massachusetts Local Public Health Performance Standards, which defined basic levels of services and workforce credentials and training, framed the assessment. As part of this assessment, a qualitative review of documentation submitted by municipalities was conducted, focusing on various subject areas to evaluate the implementation of crucial public health services.

The nuisance documents included documentation related to the last five closed complaints.

# Capacity Assessment Key Findings

## **1. Clarifying What Is/Is Not a Nuisance**

The document submissions indicated that there needs to be a universal understanding of what constitutes a nuisance.

* Nuisance is not necessarily synonymous with a complaint. Since interpretations of what counts as a nuisance vary between health departments, there is a unique opportunity to collaborate on a more universal definition.
* Some documents submitted were complaints from neighbors rather than a defined nuisance.
* There is an area of opportunity for the Training Hubs to establish a standardized definition to ensure alignment across municipalities.

## **2. Complete Documentation**

Nuisance documentation was often informal and incomplete, which resulted in gaps in important information regarding follow-up actions and enforcement.

* Some possible explanations for this lack of documentation include no standard intake form, undefined follow-up procedures, uncertainty about what qualifies as a nuisance, and time constraints in addressing nuisances.
* There is the opportunity for the development of a standardized form that captures who is filing the nuisance complaint, a detailed description of the problem, why an inspection was necessary, results of the inspection, follow-up of any findings, and a proper closing of the complaint identifying all corrections observed.

Effective nuisance documentation necessitates standardized intake forms, a clear definition of what constitutes a nuisance, and differentiation between complaints and nuisances. A robust inspection report should address who, what, where, when, and why, emphasize compliance with due dates, note unaddressed issues, include signed complaints, and include essential field details.

# Qualitative Findings

The list below outlines the reasons each type of nuisance-related documentation did not meet the proficiency standard. The most frequently selected determinations are bolded and ordered by frequency from greatest to least. **The most significant issue for nuisances overall was the absence of a follow-up action, or the follow-up action was not properly documented.**

## Backup Documentation Results

For nuisances, 808 documents were requested. Of those, 584 (72%) were submitted, and of those submitted, 337 (58%) were deemed proficient.

## Complaint #1/2/3/4/5 Documents Evaluation Criteria

1. **Follow-up action not completed or documented**
2. **Violations identified without documented follow-up action**
3. Reinspection not completed or documented
4. Critical fields not completed
5. Form insufficient or not approved
6. Reinspection not completed or documented
7. Unreasonable inspectional timeline based on the complaint