

## 8-28-09 Local Public Health Websites

Most of us depend on websites for contact information and up to the minute situation reports. Even if your head functions in an old fashioned way, as mine still does much of the time, we discover that the old ways of finding information are time consuming and may not even exist. For instance, a recent look at my small phone book left me wondering what happened to Plympton, Town of and Halifax, Town of. That's when I whacked my forehead with the heel of my hand and announced, "I could've had a V-Eight!" That's my euphemism for "dah!" I was once again reminded that it is now faster and more accurate (usually) to go to an organization's website than it is to look for information in a phone book, make a call and ask routine questions.

Not having to pick up the phone to answer routine questions also allows employees to use more of their time for actually accomplishing necessary tasks. That's a good thing. Some employees, however, are so diligent and shall I say, antsy, that they just have to keep busy, busy, busy. I am blessed with working with one of those antsy, I mean, amazing people who love to get stuff done. My Peggy has been the Halifax Board of Health's administrative assistant for two years now. Early on she realized that we did not have any information on the town website. In her own time, without compensation, except for personal satisfaction, she learned how to make a website and little by little, built one just for us, and for you, too.

So, tah-da! And drum roll, please, as we welcome you our own website world within the Town's site. Visit the Halifax MA website and go to the Town Departments and click on Health, Board of. The door opens to show you most of what we do. You'll get a feel for the wide variety of topics a board of health deals with. You can look up meeting minutes, regulations, my columns, forms and applications and more. While there, use the links to stay informed on such important issues as the H1N1 virus. You'll notice Peggy's favorite topic with all her links on animal issues.

Including useful links is important because when we are looking, wondering or researching, one question leads to another. That's how we learn. Why go to five websites when we can start with one and have that link lead us to the next logical place? It is useful for me, too, because if I am to address current issues of algae, inspections, and recent queries, then I can't also be giving you the latest on one ongoing topic such as influenza. I don't think you would be reading this now if I talked about the same topic each week for six months. So, dip into it as needed with those useful links, added by our friend, Peggy.

Some sites have also included blogs. I don't have the time for that but our State Public Health Department has modernized its ways of communicating by adding one to their H1N1 reports. Some people like the interactive aspect of blogs. It's conversational, as you can comment on it and read other's comments.

While I don't have the time to converse with blogs on a daily basis, I just thought of a way to dip into one. I can comment, at least once, on MA DPH's H1N1 blog. With that one action, I can help the State of Massachusetts know what a health agent is wondering and, if you look at the blog, you can look at the comments.

Keeping in mind, again, how we learn and the social psychology aspects of interacting, the ability to comment on a blog is interesting. It does not matter how old we are. Many of us still feel like shy children when it comes to commenting, especially if

we are the first. Once that first response is out there, though, then we are more likely to jump into the conversation.

So, even though I can feel my heart rate increase at the thought of being the first, I will ignore the inner child's insecurities and comment on DPH's H1N1 blog. I have several questions needing answers before we can respond appropriately this fall to the seasonal flu and the pandemic one.

Who knows, maybe my comment will trigger another and maybe, just hopefully and maybe, it will lead to some answers. But, for now, please don't go directly to the MA DPH site. Please visit Halifax's and open the door to the world of public health through our brand spanking new Board of Health website, a gift to us from amazing Peggy.

*Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for the Town of Halifax, MA. She welcomes your comments and says it's even OK to be the first to do so! She can be reached at 781 293 6768 or [cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us](mailto:cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us)*

P.S. After composing my comment on the H1N1 blog at MA DPH, I posted it and received the response that it could not post my data! Gotta love this online stuff! I then went to a "comment" section on the website to tell them of the problem. I hope they respond. (And to think that I was going to be the first in a conversation!)

P.P.S. Thank you to all the people who called and emailed with bat stories and bat questions in response to the two-part column on bat facts and how they are beneficial. It was great hearing from you.