

HEALTH OFFICER

Roles and Responsibilities

The local health officer is a hybrid position. Although the selectboard recommends an individual for appointment to the position and works with the individual on local health problems, the local health officer is appointed by the state commissioner of health. 18 V.S.A. § 601. In addition, although the health officer is paid by the town, he or she is considered a state employee for purposes of liability insurance coverage and state laws that protect public employees. 18 V.S.A. §§ 602, 624.

The local health officer performs an important function for the town. He or she is the individual a citizen may call to complain of unsafe conditions in rental housing or on public or private property, or to report a septic failure, or an animal that might be rabid. The health officer must investigate all complaints and has extensive authority to take emergency abatement steps and may enforce any state health regulations and local health ordinances in his or her town.

- The health officer serves an appointment of three years, and until a successor is appointed. 18 V.S.A. § 605. Upon written request of the local board of health, the state commissioner of health may appoint one or more deputy health officers for a town. 18 V.S.A. § 601(a).
 - The health officer serves as the executive officer and secretary of the local board of health, which is made up of the selectboard (or city council) plus the health officer. 18 V.S.A. §§ 604, 605. The local board of health is responsible to make and enforce rules and regulations for the prevention, removal or destruction of public health hazards, and the mitigation of public health risks. These rules must be approved by the state commissioner of health. 18 V.S.A. § 613(a).
 - The local health officer must inspect all schools and public buildings. 18 V.S.A. § 608.
 - In the enforcement of its rules and health policies, the health officer and local board of health may call upon law enforcement officers for assistance. An officer who refuses to render assistance when so requested shall be fined up to \$200. 18 V.S.A. § 617.
 - The health officer may go before the state commissioner of health or the selectboard to obtain a health order, or in certain situations, has the authority to issue an emergency health order to prevent or abate an imminent and substantial health hazard or risk. 18 V.S.A. §§ 126, 127.
- ☛ For more information about the roles and responsibilities of the health officer or local health board, please consult the Vermont Department of Health's *Environmental Health Handbook for Town Health Officers*, available at your local Health Department district office, or VLCT's *Handbook for Vermont Selectboards*, Chapter IV, Section B.