

New distance learning technology: WebCast and Video Conferencing

The Video Communications and Distance Learning Division of the Bureau of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease continues making strides in distance learning and conferencing.

WebCast technology now provides opportunities for participation in department programs through the Internet. For example, news conferences held in the division's studio are transmitted to Alabama media by satellite and simultaneous webcast allowing print and radio journalists access to the news conferences via computer technology. Reporters can view the news conference as well as access the written news release and other materials prepared for the conference.

These department news conferences and select educational programs can also be viewed on your computer. Satellite conferences and select educational programs are also available for what is commonly known as "on-demand viewing." This allows viewers to see the programs from their own personal computers anywhere and anytime. These are now available from the division's Web site. The Web site home page is <http://www.adph.org/alphtn>.

Department employees needing assistance or experiencing technical difficulties should contact the Help Desk of the Computer Systems Center at (334) 206-5268 or their bureau or office contact person for computer assistance.

Land-based video conferencing is another method to assist with linking people in different locales to facilitate small training groups and meetings. "Through a cooperative agreement with the University of South Alabama, the department now has one video conferencing system at the RSA Tower that allows state office personnel to participate in important training and meetings that require two-way audio and two-way video," Michael Smith, division director, said.

The University of South Alabama provided and installed the equipment that connects the department to ViaNet (Videoconferencing in Alabama Network) and its 133 other sites. There is at least one system in every county, usually located at schools.

"This technology reduces travel costs and increases productivity," Smith said. Bureau director Jim McVay, Dr.P.A, compared the two-way communication to a "Hollywood Squares" format with up to nine views on the monitors or it can isolate the view to focus on only one



Land-based video conferencing is useful for conducting small training groups and meetings that require two-way audio and video.

site on each of the two television monitors. Participants can even present information from a computer including slides, spreadsheets or Internet sites.

The two-way system is situated in the RSA Tower's conference room 984. For more information or to schedule a conference, contact division staff at (334) 206-5618.