

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF PUBLIC HEALTH GIS

With apologies to Mel Brooks, and thanks for editorial assistance to Elizabeth Kirby and for their insights to the following Internet contributors:

Dabo Brantley, DRH, CDC

Virginia Lee, ASTDR

Dona Schneider, Rutgers University

Russel Rickard, Colorado Department of Health and Environment

Dianne Enright, NC State Department of Health Statistics

Ravi Sharma, University of Pittsburgh

R.S. Kirby, December 2005

The Ten Commandments of Public Health GIS

Number 10

Thou shalt not expect health outcomes or disease states to respect administrative (block, census tract, ZIP Code, municipal) boundaries.

But without collecting geography in thine data, thou hast nothing that can be mapped.

The Ten Commandments of Public Health GIS

Number 9

**Thou shalt not unknowingly
commit spatial errors.**

The Ten Commandments of Public Health GIS

Number 8

**Know thy purpose (in creating
and using your public health GIS).**

**Corollary: Thou shalt always be
cognizant that the **Scientific
Method** is not a built-in feature of
any GIS software application.**

The Ten Commandments of Public Health GIS

Number 7

**Thou shalt know and understand
thine data prior to bringing it into
a GIS.**

The Ten Commandments of Public Health GIS

Number 6

**Thou shalt remember that while
thine map is an abstraction, it
reflects the physical environment
and is based on data representing
actual events that occurred to
individual people.**

The Ten Commandments of Public Health GIS

Number 5

Thou shalt protect individual records containing X,Y coordinates as thou would protect records with individual identifiers, as both can reveal confidential information.

The Ten Commandments of Public Health GIS

Number 4

Thou shalt not clutter thine health data maps with unnecessary layers and map elements (i.e. **chartjunk**), nor shalt thou ignore information necessary to interpret the patterns on your map.

The Ten Commandments of Public Health GIS

Number 4 - addendum

**“The real art of cartography is
knowing more what to leave out,
more than what to put in.”**

- John Parsons

The Ten Commandments of Public Health GIS


Number 3

Know thine Metadata.

The Ten Commandments of Public Health GIS

Number 2

Thou shalt not assume that the default settings of your GIS software will generate useful and meaningful maps.



The Ten Commandments of Public Health GIS

Number 1

Thou shalt show humility to others, and be gracious even unto those who thought it would take weeks to accomplish what thou hast done in a few hours.

