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EHS Internship – Open Pit Mining Operation, Nicaragua

During Summer 2011 I was offered an opportunity to work as an Environmental, Health, and Safety (EHS) Intern at a small open pit mine in Nicaragua. The experience was challenging for me as many of the issues faced daily have not yet been covered in my curriculum at Colorado State University (when is the class where they talk about security patrols being bitten by poisonous snakes)! I worked directly with the Environmental Department to understand how the mining operation interacts with surrounding



environment, the Health and Safety Department to understand occupational health issues at an industrial site located in a developing country, and the Country Public Relations Manager to learn how the company educates stakeholders in the mining industry. Additionally, I had the



opportunity to volunteer for a non-profit organization and work with a local community on public health issues. This summer really helped me grow and made me realize that it is impossible to isolate one area of environmental health.

While at the mine, I was given the task of evaluating noise stress at the various working areas. I was asked to compare Nicaraguan Laws on noise regulations and hearing tests with OSHA regulations, Mining Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) regulations, and even International Finance Corporation (IFC) regulations to see how well the company managed noise stress and make suggestions for improvement. I enjoyed comparing local practices to US standards and learned the difficulties of “principles versus reality”.

I was also asked to work with the environmental water sampling group at the mine. Water sampling is important for the company because it allows them to know if they are polluting or in noncompliance with national water quality regulations. It was interesting to learn how it is possible to know if a river ecosystem is in balance based on the microorganisms that are collected in the water samples and to learn which chemicals the company was testing for to understand water quality compliance.

I also worked with the corporate community liaison officer to develop public health information that is provided to the local population. I wrote bulletins for the miners and their

families on the importance of recycling, washing hands, and wearing safety goggles. I spoke with locals and helped them understand what the company was doing related to EHS.

Outside of the internship, I volunteered for the Manna Project. This organization held classes in poor communities about the importance of washing hands before eating, eating healthy, being active, and how to properly brush teeth. This was tons of fun because we got to play with children all day and hopefully teach them how to be a little healthier.



Overall I had some amazing experiences and met many people that I will never forget. It was interesting to see how the workers' health, the community's health, and the company's goals all interplay to create a complex web that needs to be accounted for during development of a project. I loved feeling like I was improving all aspects of this web and came to realize that environmental health is important because the field does not isolate any of these elements.