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JRCOSTEP Summer 2009

IHS OEH Shawnee Field Office



Opportunities abound in the JRCOSTEP internship. I applied for this amazing program not really knowing what to expect. I was offered a position for the Shawnee Field Office in Oklahoma. Before this experience I was only familiar with a small portion of Northeast Oklahoma where my grandmother lives. I nonetheless accepted the offer eagerly.

As a Junior Commissioned Officer in the US Public Health Service, I have been exposed to many of the obligations of Environmental Health Professionals and have learned a great deal about the science. I have attended a rabies clinic (where I unfortunately didn't get to administer vaccines due to Oklahoma state laws), investigated water well complaints, and attended a NAIP (injury prevention) meeting.



I was also lucky enough to attend a conference and a few trainings. The 14<sup>th</sup> Annual

Inter-Tribal Environmental Council Conference was held in Tulsa on June 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. Here I gained valuable information about current environmental issues and networked with people in this field. I attended 12 lectures on topics such as Environmental Impacts, Local Community Sustainability, Community Revitalization, and Recycling. Some of my favorite lectures include “Iowa Tribe’s Bison and Cattle Program”, “Market Challenges in Recycling”, and “Phenology”. One of the most important lessons was the importance of recycling, even if a down economy doesn’t make it profitable. After all, someone has to get paid to pick up and sort recyclables, right? Foremost, we need to reduce our waste and rethink our needs. We then must recycle as much of our waste as we can. The more we reuse and save from the sanitary landfills and dumps, the more land and resources we save.

Food safety is major part of environmental health science as well. Indian Health Services is responsible for providing food handler’s trainings and technical assistance for tribes. I had the great opportunity to present a food handler’s training at a local casino for about 25 people. I also lead a kitchen inspection at a tribal headstart as shown in these pictures. The first picture demonstrates one of the violations I found, which is an unlabeled bottle of cleaner. The second picture is the exit interview with the person in charge of the kitchen. The survey went well and the employees were more than willing to correct violations on site.



Pool school was one of the trainings I went to in June. It was a one day class held by the Oklahoma City-County Health Department, who has been offering it for decades. It was fun, sometimes scary (when hearing about recent and past drownings and pool related deaths and injuries) and very informative. I discovered why it is a full time job to take care of a pool and the skill required to maintain a safe and clean one. I am now a Certified Public Bathing Place Operator.

I attended the Healthy Homes Training in Norman, OK on July 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> as well. Here I learned the essentials to keeping a house safe and healthy. Really, it is all about prevention and maintenance. The seven “keep-its” we learned were keep it clean, dry, safe, ventilated, pest-free, contaminant-free, and maintained. I also had the opportunity to network more with IHS employees and Commissioned Officers as well as with the

presenters. I got to take home materials and manuals to assist in future academics and careers.

Although I had many training opportunities, I assisted my supervisor in field operations mostly. We conducted a wide variety of surveys including sanitary, food service, casino establishment, headstart, and individual requests. The two sanitary surveys I attended let me see the real world application of the curriculum I learned in school. Water is essential to life. The IHS Office of Environmental Health (IHS OEH) assists tribes in providing clean and safe drinking water to customers by surveying the whole community water system for current and potential problems and dangers. IHS OEH will then document these findings and make recommendations.



One of the most memorable experiences was the tour of the Iowa Tribe's Grey Snow Eagle House, which is a sanctuary for non-releasable and rehabilitating Bald and Golden Eagles. The Iowas call it Bah Kho-Je Xla Chi in their native tongue. It was an awesome experience to be in the presence of such majestic creatures. The facility has two flight cages, a side mews, and quarantine facility to house the birds. One of the flight cages is complete with viewing windows. Our tour guide introduced us to all of their non-releasable birds, which they name. I was amazed at the quality of their facilities and was very appreciative for the time and effort they put into educating myself and others. The Grey Snow Eagle House has a great vision for the future and I encourage anyone to pay them a visit.

Being a Commissioned Officer has great appeal to me and I knew a lot about the Corps before applying for this position. It is my goal to be a USPHS Officer in the future and I feel very grateful for this opportunity. Since starting work at Shawnee, I have firsthand experience with PHS, its officers, its mission, and its daily accomplishments. I am determined even more to be an officer now. This is for reasons such as the camaraderie of the corps, the military benefits, job security, its professionalism, and its committed service to providing the best in public health. If you share the same values in public health, I invite you to apply for the JRCOSTEP position.