

INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE – BEMIDJI AREA
2022 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST OF THE YEAR
LT JOSEPH SARISKY

Introduction:

The 2022 Bemidji Area Environmental Health Specialist (EHS) of the Year is LT Joseph Sarisky, MPH, REHS. LT Sarisky is recognized for leadership, dedicated service, innovative practice and professionalism that substantially elevated environmental health services to the Bemidji Area Tribes. He has sustained quality performance throughout the year and most noteworthy has been the introduction of a novel, low cost hand washing station unit for mobile food vendors and his assistance with plan reviews for the Duluth Field Office Expansion Project.

Professionalism:

LT Sarisky is a Sr. Field Environmental Health Officer (O-4 billet) for the Minnesota District Office. He is responsible for leading, administering and implementing environmental health services to four tribes (four-person year workload) in Minnesota. He continuously produces high quality reports to the tribes he serves and was personally requested by a Tribal Health Director to continue services even after being transferred to the newly formed Duluth Field Office.

LT Sarisky quickly established himself as a valuable employee while working with key Area and District programs, assuming leadership roles and providing new employees with orientation and cross training. He created a new hire orientation check list as well as a first-time user guide for WebEHRS survey report entry. LT Sarisky has been a mentor to a graduate student intern working on a vector surveillance thesis. He also mentor two new employees and provided them with extensive training in survey techniques.

LT Sarisky has a Master of Public Health degree and is professionally registered, REHS with the National Environmental Health Association. He is a certified Serv Safe Instructor and recently completed the Injury Prevention Level III training, Lead Testing Level III and OSHA 30 Hour Training. His technical competencies and leadership make him a true asset to our DEHS program and heavily relied upon to serve the tribal communities.

Special Accomplishments:

Lead Grant: LT Sarisky established a partnership with the Great Lakes Inter Tribal Epidemiology Center to test Head Starts and Schools for lead levels in drinking water. First year activities included: developing sample collection protocols, establishing testing site locations and protocols to communicate sample results. This process is a necessary step to ensuring lead free water systems in these child learning environments.

Healthy Homes: LT Sarisky compiles Minnesota data for the Bemidji Area's Healthy Homes Grant, which is a 1.2-million-dollar funded project by the EPA. Several homes and a Boys and Girls Club were evaluated for mold and LT Sarisky provided crucial remediation strategies, which resulted in no further indoor air or moisture complaints. Data collection included healthy homes survey results, activities, and remediation strategies. Maintaining this grant is crucial to our efforts to continue to provide guidance to the tribes and reduce the risk of illness in residential home environments. LT Sarisky has established key partnerships with the tribes he serves, which further enhances the effectiveness of the Healthy Homes Program.

Duluth Expansion Plan Reviews: LT Sarisky served as the DEHS lead on the Duluth Field Office Expansion Project. He conducted plan reviews and actively participated in meetings addressing optimal design, IT needs and the moving/relocation process. Adding this office and staffing it will greatly improve the overall delivery of services in our region.

Vector Surveillance: LT Sarisky developed educational materials for the DEHS Vector Surveillance program. These materials included: general information on tick borne illnesses, safe tick removal procedures and tick species identification. He also developed a mosquito guidance pamphlet, which contained data on mosquito borne illnesses, exposure reduction strategies, and mosquito species identification. These materials will assist in educating tribal members on the dangers of tick borne and mosquito borne illnesses and work to reduce rates of vector borne diseases.

Innovation:

Mobile Hand Washing Stations: LT Sarisky noted a frequent finding associated with mobile food vendors lacking proper hand washing stations. He researched and developed a low-cost solution for mobile food vendors and marketed the design and implementation. LT Sarisky had all 6 outdoor celebration events that he covered adopt his mobile handwashing station recommendation, which increased hand washing station compliance from 75 percent to 98 percent.

Food Safety: LT Sarisky developed a quick reference guide for itinerant food vendors in our service region. These laminated business style cards enabled itinerant food vendors to quickly reference proper food cooking, cold holding, and hot holding temperatures. Marketing, implementation and reference has reduced the risk of food borne illnesses at venues where itinerant food vendors were present.

Injury Prevention: LT Sarisky is a leader and advocate for injury prevention work in our region. He has completed all levels of Injury Prevention courses (I, II & III). Through his community connections, advocacy and linking tribes to resources, he has fostered projects and partnerships that have not been in place for many years. Partnerships between the DEHS, Johns Hopkins University and the tribes are improving injury prevention data collection and driving tribal injury prevention priorities such as Safe Streets and Roads grants, motor vehicle injury prevention, and seatbelt use data collection.

National Mobile WebEHRS Acceptance Testing: LT Sarisky participated in a three-month process of field testing the new Mobile WebEHRS software. This involved conducting various assessments and entering data into mobile devices to test the new mobile system. He then reported his user interface experience, issues and recommendations. This process identified deficiencies, which then led to software corrections and an improved product for all DEHS programs.

Summary:

LT Joseph Sarisky has exemplified leadership, dedication, professionalism, and mentoring as a Sr. Field Environmental Health Officer. The BAIHS, DEHS program proudly recognizes LT Joseph Sarisky as our 2022 Environmental Specialist of the Year with nomination to the IHS EHS of the year.