

**ENS Zack Hanley  
Jr COSTEP Summer 2011  
Illinois State University  
Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium  
Sitka, Alaska**



I first learned about the U.S. Public Health Service and the JrCOSTEP program from retired USPHS CAPT George Byrns, one of my professors in the Environmental Health program at Illinois State University. I was instantly enthralled by the idea of such an opportunity and began the application process as soon as I returned from class that day. The large amount of paperwork was made significantly less of a burden thanks to the help of LT Jennifer Dobson and LTJG Katie Burbage. I was very excited when I found out later that I had been selected for a JrCOSTEP position with SEARHC in Sitka, Alaska. Later on in the year, I received word that a commissioning process had been delayed. Thankfully, ANTHC was able to bring on all JrCOSTEPs in Alaska as direct hires until commissioning was possible.

During my time here, I was offered a variety of different experiences. I worked alongside members of SEARHC's Employee Wellness team, conducting ergonomics assessments of a variety of workstations. I assisted my coworker in conducting waste center surveys in Angoon, Hydaburg, and Hoonah, as well as annual environmental health and safety surveys of the Senior Center in Hoonah and the Raven's Way facilities in Sitka.

I had the chance to travel to Angoon and Hydaburg with the environmental health team to perform Healthy Homes surveys. The focus of these surveys was on problems such as poor ventilation, mold and moisture accumulation, indoor air quality, safety and fire hazards, handicap accessibility problems, damage to the structural integrity of homes, and sanitation issues. The findings are then used to prepare individual reports for the residents, local housing authorities, community associations and other agencies to use as leverage for acquiring the funding necessary to address these problems.

From my time spent traveling throughout southeast Alaska, I learned that there are challenges to be met when trying to meet the needs of the people here. Unique cultural practices and values must be understood in order to provide the most effective service. An extra effort towards education on environmental health concerns and proper practices will go a long way in keeping the land and the people of Alaska healthy.



In my spare time I was able to take advantage of everything that Sitka had to offer. I spent a lot of time hiking the many trails in the area. I spent a weekend salmon fishing and camping with my coworker. We were able to explore areas of Baranof Island, Prince of Wales Island and Admiralty Island where the land is teeming with bears, whales, sea lions, seals, deer and eagles.

My experience in Alaska this summer was extremely unique. Other internship opportunities in environmental health simply can not measure up to the quality and quantity of hands on experience that the JrCOSTEP offers. I would recommend the JrCOSTEP to anyone who is seriously considering a career with the U.S. Public Health Service or in the Environmental Health field. Friendly people, helpful and knowledgeable coworkers, and the marvelous landscape of Alaska helped to make this the most memorable summer of my life.