

ENS Gina Ploessl
JRCOSTEP Summer 2012
University of Wisconsin Eau Claire
Rhineland District Office
Rhineland, Wisconsin

My experience as a JRCOSTEP with Indian Health Services (IHS) was more than I could have ever asked for. Not only did it pose as a wonderful learning experience, but the welcoming employees at the Rhineland District Office (RDO) also ensured a memorable life experience. I was able to encounter many different aspects of environmental health during my JRCOSTEP, including education, inspections and prevention.



Although I did not have a specific project to work on per se, upon arriving in Rhineland I was told the main purpose of my summer would be to gain hands on knowledge with a variety of Environmental Health surveys. LTJG Scott Daly, my preceptor, did a wonderful job of introducing me to the many varied aspects of these surveys. Coming into this experience I had an idea of what I would be inspecting: casinos, restaurants, temporary food vendors, convenience stores and pools, as these were the kind of inspections I had learned about in school and experienced during my previous internship. I was pleasantly surprised, however, that along with these establishments I was also able to inspect clinics, domestic abuse shelters, daycares, playgrounds and food warehouses, just to name a few. I also gained experience in writing formal reports to follow up on many of my surveys.

We also responded to homeowner complaints of mold and pests. In addition I was given the opportunity to accompany the engineers on operation and maintenance surveys of the water and wastewater systems on the reservations and assess the various health and safety aspects. We also spent a day assessing the problem of open dumpsites on a local reservation with officials from the USEPA. I was able to expand my knowledge beyond the food code and gain knowledge of OSHA, fire, building and electrical codes as well. The ability to broaden my knowledge of the different aspects of Environmental Health offered an invaluable experience that one cannot gain in the classroom.



In terms of education I was able to assist in temporary food handler training for food vendors at the Pow Wows. We also held basic food handler trainings for casino employees and cooks at various tribal locations such as elders' centers and daycare facilities. I also assisted in a ServSafe Managers Course and OSHA related safety trainings.

The RDO covers 12 Native American tribes in Wisconsin and Michigan. Because of this I was able to travel throughout both states, and meet a variety of different people. Each day led to new and exciting experiences.

I am delighted to report that with the experience and knowledge I have gained from my JRCOSTEP, I have found the career path for me. I would highly recommend COSTEP for anyone interested in Environmental Health of the U.S. Public Health Service. It will bring you an experience that will challenge you both personally and professionally, it will teach you ever so important problem solving skills and will be a wonderful groundwork for you future career in environmental health.