

ENS Sam Frank
Jr. COSTEP Summer 2013
Boise State University
Office of Environmental Health
Gallup Service Unit
Gallup, New Mexico



Hello, my name is Sam Frank, and I am currently a senior attending Boise State University located in sunny Boise, Idaho. I am majoring in Environmental and Occupational Health Science as well as minoring in Biological Science. I am planning on graduating this Fall 2013 with a Bachelor's of Science degree in Environmental Health. After hearing about the Jr. COSTEP internship opportunity with the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) last year in one of my environmental health classes, I knew that such an incredible opportunity to work at the highest level in environmental health could not be passed up. So, I took on the application process, determined to obtain a costep with the USPHS. A few short months after submitting my application, I was thrilled to learn that I had been selected as a Jr. COSTEP for the upcoming summer!



I soon found out that my duty station was going to be at the Office of Environmental Health (OEH) on the Navajo Nation Indian Reservation in Gallup, NM. The Navajo Nation is the largest Native American Indian reservation in terms of landmass in the entire country. It is located in the four corners area of the southwestern U.S. spanning over 27,000 square miles into parts of Utah, New Mexico, Colorado and Arizona.

As a Junior Environmental Health Officer I took on a variety of tasks and duties under the direction and supervision of my preceptor, Captain Wayne Hall (District Sanitarian). CAPT Hall oversees both the Gallup and Crownpoint service units and has more than 20 years of professional experience as a USPHS commissioned corps officer. Along with CAPT Hall, I worked with a team of extremely talented staff including: Delores Loretto (Service Unit Sanitarian), LTJG Tim DenHerder (E.H.O.), Nellie Benally and Doris Lynch (Field Sanitarians), Gerilyn Sheppard (Office Administrator), Theresa Yazzie (District Injury Prevention Specialist), Geraldine Ashley (Tribal Sanitarian) and Leonard Freeland (Environmental Health Technician).



My first task after arriving in Gallup was to assist in the annual rabies clinics conducted each summer at the 32 communities in the Gallup and Crownpoint service units. Because the rabies virus is endemic to the area, OEH provides free immunizations to household pets to reduce their risk of carrying the virus, which could then be transmitted to residents in the community. I quickly learned the proper technique of vaccinating both canines and felines, documented each individual immunization administered, provided rabies tags to pet owners, and presented educational information to the public on the prevention and



risks associated with the disease. Even though the rabies clinics were a very important part of my internship experience, they constituted just a small fraction of the overall work conducted at the Gallup and Crownpoint service units. I participated in a variety of surveys and inspections of facilities including; senior centers, rehabilitation centers, and a correctional facility. I conducted community drinking water surveys where we provided assistance to the Navajo Nation EPA to ensure water system compliance and safety. I helped set up

and carry out Food Handler's Trainings to teach the proper techniques of handling food safely, and conducted pre-operational inspections of a restaurant and convenience store in the surrounding community. Many people look forward to the 4th of July holiday to relax with family and friends, however, working in the environmental health field doesn't necessarily allow for such luxuries. I spent my 4th of July weekend inspecting food vendors at the Window Rock Fair and Rodeo to ensure their compliance with the Navajo Nation Food Code. This might not sound like much fun to many, but I had a blast working with each individual food stand, ensuring that they were practicing safe food handling techniques, in order to serve safe and delicious food to the public and prevent foodborne illnesses.

One of the biggest benefits of being a costep, was the ability to be involved in the many different facets of public health. I not only got to work with the Office of Environmental Health, but also with the Division of Occupational Health and Safety Management and Injury Prevention Programs. I conducted both **NFPA Life Safety Code** and **OSHA** safety surveys at two area hospitals on the Navajo Nation. I carried out a ventilation survey at the Ft. Defiance Indian Hospital, ensuring the operating rooms and isolation units were maintaining adequate "air changes" each hour to keep patients safe. I spent time reviewing patient charts from our local hospital to find and document preventable injuries in order to track trends in things such as elder falls, seat belt useage, and bicycle helmet use. I also conducted carseat surveys, and even a carseat clinic where the public could drop by and have a certified technician properly train them on the installation and use of their child's seat.



My internship with the USPHS over the course of the summer was a fun filled adventure that provided me with such incredible insight and hands on experience in the field of environmental health, that I intend to pursue a career with the comissioned corps after I graduate in the fall. I felt that the experience gained with this internship was immeasurable, and really did prepare me for a job with the comissioned corps. I would highly recommend anybody studying environmental health, and looking for an incredible internship opportunity, to consider applying for the Jr. COSTEP position.