

**ENS Phillip Dean
Jr. COSTEP Summer 2013
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My name is Phillip Dean; I am a rising senior in the Environmental Health program at Western Carolina University. I am looking forward to graduating with my Bachelors of Science degree in Environmental Health this upcoming May. I will then begin my journey of working in the real world, applying the knowledge that I have gained in school and during my COSTEP internship to real life situations. I first learned of the COSTEP program from one of my professors, after I mentioned joining the military service as a post-college goal. Like many others, I had never heard of the Public Health Service (PHS) or Indian Health Service (IHS) before. I looked into the COSTEP program and quickly thought it would be a tremendous learning experience, as well as a possible career opportunity. I highly regard my time spent at the Holton Office of Environmental Health & Engineering (OEH&E) Field Station as an invaluable opportunity in my educational path. I was able to gain not only experience working with the Environmental Health Officer, but I was able to gain experience and knowledge working with the Field Engineers as well.

The Holton OEH&E Field Station is located 30 miles north of Topeka, Kansas and services four tribes in Northeastern Kansas. The tribes include the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, Kickapoo Tribe in Kansas, Sac and Fox Nation of Missouri in Kansas & Nebraska, and the Iowa Tribe of Kansas & Nebraska. The Holton Field Station is also responsible for servicing Haskell Indian Nation University and Haskell Health Center in Lawrence, KS. There was almost always something going on in the Holton service area requiring the attention of the Environmental Health Officer. I feel that I saw the entire northeastern section of Kansas from all of the traveling I did while providing assistance to the different area tribes on a regular basis.



This summer was an eye opening experience for me because the COSTEP program gave me the opportunity to test the knowledge I have gained over my first three years of college and put them to actual use. I became immersed into a very diverse working environment, which provided me with an increased amount of knowledge and experience to enhance the basic background that I had in the environmental health field, prior to becoming a COSTEP intern. Because of the small size of the Holton Field Station, I was able to work with the engineers at different times, doing some of the miscellaneous field work necessary to serve the individual homes in the native communities.

During my internship, I was assigned to LCDR Jamison Honeycutt, Environmental Health Officer for the Holton Field Station and Safety Officer for the Haskell Health Center. I assisted Jamison in conducting a great number of food sanitation surveys for permanent and temporary food service vendors in the Holton service area. I conducted food sanitation surveys for the tribal casinos, convenience stores, food distribution centers, and various community facilities, including a Boys & Girls Club and Elder Center, and at special events, including powwows and even an outdoor barbeque contest. I became very comfortable conducting food sanitation surveys during my internship, which greatly enhances my experience for my future career in Environmental Health.

Institutional and wastewater surveys were commonly conducted by the Environmental Health Officer (EHO) at the Holton OEH&E Field Station. Institutional surveys were done at the casinos, senior centers, and Boys & Girls Clubs to ensure the facilities being utilized were a safe environment for the patrons. Because many

wastewater systems used in Kansas residential and commercial areas are sewage lagoons, wastewater surveys were conducted on a regular basis to ensure the system was being maintained and operating properly.

Jamison has an overwhelming amount of knowledge in septic and wastewater systems because of his previous experience as a sanitarian in the central Virginia health district. His experience is of great use to the field engineers when laying out a wastewater system for a new home or for an upgrade to an existing communal wastewater system. At our station, the engineers spent a lot of time working with tribal homeowners to ensure their water and wastewater systems were working and being properly maintained. The engineers relied on Jamison's expertise on new home construction sites to see if the soil was going perc and allow wastewater to be absorbed into the ground. This perc test determined what kind of septic system would be installed. Jamison showed me how to texture soil to determine if the soil would be okay for an in-ground septic system or a wastewater lagoon.

I gained a large amount of hands-on experience using the WebEHRS system, which is the system used by IHS to write up and submit all of the different types of surveys the IHS EHO's conduct. I also familiarized myself with the U.S. Public Health Service FDA 2009 Food Code and learned how to locate the different regulations covering common violations. One of the greatest highlights of my internship was when I conducted a Safe Food Handler's training course to the staff members of the PBPN's Boys & Girls Club.



On several occasions, I got the chance to go out to the field with the engineers to conduct land surveying. We surveyed points for a future waterline extension and for a home septic system. LCDR D. Lyle Setwyn, USPHS Supervisory Environmental Engineer, showed me how to set up and scout out the areas that we were going to be surveying. I also went out with Jim Shane, Engineering Technician for the Holton Field Office, to learn how to use and operate the GPS unit and LASER levels often used in land surveying. While land surveying is not normal EHO work, it is still important because it helped me better understand site maps, proposed and as-built drawings, as well as general engineering practices. Working with the engineers showed me some of the endless grunt work that goes into mitigating problems that reservation homeowners commonly have with their water and wastewater systems. These were just a few of the various environmental health and engineering opportunities that presented themselves during my COSTEP internship in Holton. I feel everything I have learned during this time has greatly enhanced my knowledge base and has helped mold me into a better Environmental Health Specialist.

My COSTEP internship offered me an indispensable opportunity to work with an organization that provides great environmental health services to Native American communities, often times where safe and adequate water supply and/or wastewater disposal facilities are lacking in approximately 12% of Native American and Alaska Native homes, in comparison than 1% of homes for the general U.S. population. I gained a vast amount of knowledge during my time as a COSTEP and learned a tremendous amount about the Commission Corps, as well as the different aspects of the U.S. Public Health Service. I will greatly consider joining the Commission Corps after I graduate. This internship gave me insight into the broad spectrum of the Environmental Health field. I was able to learn what aspects of the Environmental Health field I enjoyed more than others, while gaining vast field experience. Every staff member at the Holton Field Station was extremely inviting and pleasant to work with. I could not have asked for a better group of people to work with over the summer, for there never a dull moment around the office. From my mentor, Jamison Honeycutt to Cheri-Micol Smith, our wonderful Secretary, everyone made sure I knew all of the happenings in the community and invited me to be become part of the Holton OEH&E family. Migwett (Thank you in Potawatomi) to Holton OEH&E Field Office for a great summer.

