

**Extern Sallye Countz**  
**Summer 2014**  
**East Central University**  
**Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium**  
**Anchorage, Alaska**

My name is Sallye Countz and I am currently a junior pursuing a Bachelor of Science Degree in Environmental Health at East Central University in Ada, OK. This summer I had the opportunity to work as an environmental health intern with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) in Anchorage, AK.



I was looking for an internship, as it was a degree requirement for my major, so I spoke with one of my professor's at East Central. My professor and former captain in the USPHS, Dr. Patrick Bohan, asked me where I would be interested in applying and I told him that I was willing to travel anywhere. He had spoken with one of his previous coworkers and informed me of an open position in Alaska. I applied for the internship at ANTHC, unaware of the amazing opportunity that I would soon experience. I began corresponding with my soon-to-be supervisor and my dreams transformed into my reality. I waved goodbye to Oklahoma for the summer and hello to Alaska. I was greeted with immense hospitality as soon as I arrived, and as I met my coworkers I quickly fell in love with my summer job.

My direct supervisor Josh Liles, along with the rest of the environmental health support staff at ANTHC, worked hard to ensure that I gained a wide knowledge base of all the different programs within the Environmental Health Department. I acquired a basic understanding of the work performed within the National Tribal Water Center, the Healthy Homes program, and Institutional Environmental Health. I worked more closely with the Tribal response (brownfields), field, and air quality programs. The work I was given allowed me to travel to multiple communities and gain a greater understanding of the Alaska Native culture.

One of the first assignments I was given for our Tribal response program (TRP) consisted of traveling to the 7th Annual Youth Environmental Summit, hosted by the Native Village of Gakona with Josh Liles, the Tribal response program coordinator and my direct supervisor. We were asked to help organize the event and we also had the opportunity to give the community some insight into ANTHC's TRP. We created a visual tool that helped the children create an inventory of potentially contaminated sites, or brownfields, which engaged them in a process similar to the work we do. In turn, I learned new things about the culture of Alaska from the children, and about how to survive in the event of a disaster from other volunteers who attended and taught at the event. The activity served as a deliverable for the program. Since then, I continued working with Josh to help organize the brownfields track for the 2014 Alaska Tribal Conference on Environmental Management (ATCEM), hosted by ANTHC. ATCEM is an annual conference in Alaska developed to address Alaska Native and American Indian environmental concerns on a community level.



With the field program, I traveled to multiple communities and became familiarized with performing clinic, solid waste, and water surveys. The Tribal communities that I visited include Seldovia, Ninilchik, Chitina, Kluti-Kaah, and Tyonek. I shadowed other members of our team, including Lacey Walsh, Korie Hickel, and Patrick Bloecher, who commonly conduct these surveys. They taught me tools and techniques used to effectively carry out field environmental health & safety surveys and valuable methods of communication. I was assigned the task of writing the survey reports from these trips. These reports are summaries of findings and recommendations that serve as tools to make necessary changes to ensure safety and help them comply with regulatory requirements. Although we were traveling to conduct surveys, we also addressed other concerns that the community may have had. Calibrating air monitors and discussing air quality interests were some of the additional tasks that we accomplished.

I also helped the air quality program reach a goal to complete air assessments. Before any community can begin to effectively improve their air, they must learn about the cause of the problem. The Phase I Assessment is a tool that helps tribes begin to understand air pollution hazards in their communities, and it also includes web links for those who want additional information on air quality topics covered by the assessment. I called multiple communities and interviewed their environmental/IGAP coordinators to complete the Alaska Tribal Air Quality Phase I Assessments. These communities submitted plans to the EPA concerning air quality, and we wanted to provide them with the necessary tools and resources to begin assessing their concerns. Some of the big concerns regarding air quality in Alaska include road dust, indoor air quality, and wood smoke pollution. To evaluate the amount of coverage we had across the state, I created a map that showed where we had conducted an interview. We used this map to help determine the areas of Alaska where we needed to reach.

My overall experience was amazing, to say the least. I had the opportunity to work with a wonderful group of people who are passionate about the work that they do and who inspire me to work my hardest at everything I do. Not only did I learn more about my career choice, but I also acquired a better understanding of the Alaska Native culture. I will take back the knowledge that I gained from this experience and I look forward to applying it in the classroom. This internship gives me so much to look forward to with my future career in environmental health.

