

**ENS Tommy Bentley
Jr. COSTEP Summer 2014
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Hello, my name is Tommy Bentley and this fall I will begin my senior year as an Environmental Health and Safety major at Missouri Southern State University in Joplin, Missouri. For my Jr. COSTEP internship, I served as an Environmental Health Officer (EHO) for the Indian Health Service in Pawnee, Oklahoma. The Pawnee Service Unit provides a number of services for 10 tribal nations in the north-central and northeastern sections of Oklahoma. With such a large territory and number of tribal nations to serve, there is rarely a dull moment in the life of an EHO as topics from kitchen surveys to pest infestation complaints always keep things interesting.

Initially, during the Jr. COSTEP application process, I had concerns regarding possible duty stations. Since I'm married with 2 young children, I was hoping to stay as close to home as possible but I was willing to go anywhere that I had an opportunity to participate in the Jr COSTEP program. When CDR David Hogner offered me the position in Pawnee, I was relieved since it is located near my hometown (and most of my family), and close enough to my home in Missouri to allow weekend commutes. However, as I later found out, the Pawnee Service Unit was also a great place to gain experience in a wide range of real-world environmental health topics.

During my time at the Pawnee Service Unit, I was given the opportunity to gain valuable knowledge regarding environmental health topics under the guidance of my preceptor LT Aaron McNeill. Since one of my primary interests is food safety, I felt fortunate to have access to LT McNeill and all of his knowledge on the subject. Although I had done well in a food safety class the previous semester, I feel that I learned a great deal of valuable practical knowledge by observing and listening to LT McNeill.

As much as I enjoyed the food safety aspect, there were definitely other benefits of participating in the Jr. COSTEP program. From conducting Institutional Environmental Health surveys at various tribal facilities to giving a home safety presentation to a group of Pawnee elders, there was always something new to pique my interest. One highlight of my internship was the responsibility of conducting food handler training courses for various tribal groups. Being allowed to conduct the course gave me a sense of pride in knowing that I was helping to improve the quality of food service in the area.

With the help of LT McNeill and the rest of the staff at the Pawnee Service Unit, I feel as though I've learned a great deal of practical information that cannot be learned in a classroom. Speaking to prospective Jr. COSTEP applicants, all I can say is try it out. Even if you find that the Commissioned Corps is not for you, the experience you will gain going into your career as an environmental health professional will be invaluable.

