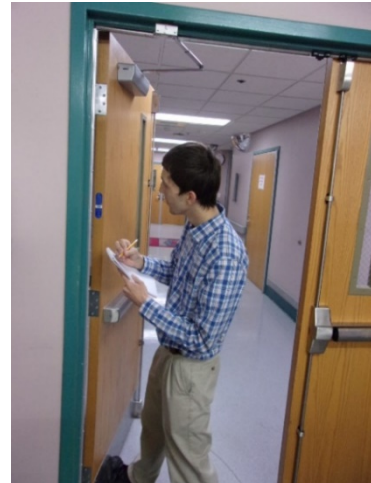


ENS Jarom Kuhre
JRCOSTEP Summer 2019
University of Utah
Great Plains Area Office
Aberdeen, South Dakota

My name is Jarom Kuhre, and I am pursuing a Master of Science in Occupational Health at the University of Utah. As part of the program, we have the opportunity to obtain real-world experience through internships. My advisor knew that I had thought about working for the government and recommended the JRCOSTEP. I applied and received an assignment to the Indian Health Service, Great Plains Area (GPA) Office in Aberdeen, SD. There I was to work within the Division of Environmental Health Services and would be tasked with completing various institutional environmental health duties throughout the Great Plains Area (SD, ND, NE, & IA). My preceptor was LCDR Kevin Bliese, Area Life Safety Engineer. My primary focus was centered on life safety issues at health care facilities in the GPA. LCDR Bliese provided me with a solid understanding of National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 101 Life Safety Code and the basic principles that govern Life Safety in the Health Care environment. A lot of what I accomplished involved monitoring and/or correcting any environmental system(s) and/or structures necessary for the protection of life during fire-related emergencies. I found the work to be very gratifying.



Inspecting fire doors at the Pine Ridge Hospital per NFPA 80 standards

I also used NFPA 99 Life Safety for Healthcare Facilities and NFPA 80 Standard for Fire Doors and Other Opening Protectives. I conducted a life safety survey of the Ft. Thompson Health Center with LCDR Bliese to prepare the facility for accreditation. This mock survey involved checking electrical panel labeling and clearance, fire extinguisher inspection and sign off, smoke barrier integrity at the ceiling, hand sanitizer placement to insure they were not near outlets and light switches, fire sprinkler location and fire panel inspections. I accompanied LCDR Bliese to the Ft. Yates Hospital in North Dakota to complete a device inventory of all life safety-related equipment for accreditation. This inventory consisted of locating and identifying all life safety equipment such as smoke/heat detectors, door holders, exit signs and emergency lights, and recording the data into Excel so contractors and hospital personnel could locate and test all devices per Joint Commission standards for accreditation. I performed inspections of 46 swinging fire/smoke doors for the Pine Ridge Hospital for accreditation. NFPA 80 requires the fire door inspector to have the necessary knowledge to inspect the doors for operation of the hardware being tested. To meet this requirement I took a 1-hour NFPA 80 online training course on the inspection, testing, and maintenance of fire doors. This provided me the knowledge to accomplish the inspection and a certificate stating I completed the training.

Also, at the Pine Ridge Hospital, I helped Terrold Menzie, District Environmental Health Specialist (EHS) assemble a master list of all safety data sheets (SDS) in the hospital. Compiling this extensive inventory involved visiting 18 departments and sifting through each of their SDS binders and entering the data into Excel by department. When the master list was completed, we moved on to archiving any SDS that was no longer in use.

In addition, I assisted Mr. Menzie and CDR Gregory Calvert, Institutional Environmental Health Officer, with respirator fit testing of the Pine Ridge Hospital employees. Mr. Menzie taught me how to conduct respirator fit tests in an efficient manner to accommodate the busy schedules of the medical staff.

I was able to support Ms. Veronica Leaf-Bellile, REHS, Service Unit EHS, at the Sisseton Service Unit during 4th of July week in performing food safety surveys in several food service facilities. Additionally, I was able to assist with the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate Wacipi (Powwow) during the 4th of July weekend. I was able to help and eventually conduct food safety surveys on my own with the local food stand operators. All food surveys focused on controlling risks related to the top five food safety risk factors (Poor Personal Hygiene, Improper Holding Temps, Improper Cooking Temps, Food from Unsafe Sources, and Contaminated Equipment/Cross Contamination).

Time spent in the office was used to read and better understand the NFPA 101 and 99 codes as they related to the healthcare industries. Time was also used to prepare for device inventories by reviewing the life safety maps and recording the total number and type of device, location, the room number of each device and, noting how often and when inspections need completion.

Overall, this internship was worth the effort as I received a broad teaching experience in Institutional Environmental Health/Safety Management and some general environmental health. The knowledge and skills I picked up during my JRCOSTEP assignment are outstanding. I know these subject areas, like Life Safety, can be challenging to understand and apply when in class so having the chance to learn them in person has helped develop a deeper appreciation of the subject matter and will allow me to stand out during future interviews.

This summer I also learned how the government operates, specifically how the hospital accreditation process takes place by Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Joint Commission. This knowledge has helped me better decide on a career choice after graduation and how best to accomplish my professional goals during my employment.

Although the travel between facilities was long, anywhere from 3 to 6 hours, it allowed me to see the state of South Dakota. Coming from Utah, I am familiar with the mountains, but I have come to appreciate the rolling plains of the Dakotas.

If anyone is considering a JRCOSTEP opportunity, take my advice and apply. This is more than a job or internship. This is a highly successful program that may turn into a career for you. With all the skills, resources, and experience the Corps has to offer, this may be the best part of your educational experience.