

Intern Mary Dipping
Summer 2019
Illinois State University
Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium
Sitka, Alaska

My name is Mary Dipping and I just graduated with my Bachelor of Science Degree in Environmental Health from Illinois State University. In order to complete this degree, I was required to complete at least 9 weeks of professional practice. I chose the Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) in Sitka, AK.

I have always had an interest in working for the Indian Health Service and enjoy traveling, so working in Sitka and getting to serve many native people was the perfect opportunity for me.

While working in Sitka, I spent most of my time doing safety work at Mt. Edgecombe Medical Center. This hospital serves the entire community of Sitka and also Alaska Natives from all over Southeast Alaska. I also had the opportunity to travel to other Southeast Alaska communities and learn about the lifestyles there and about their biggest environmental health issues. My supervisors, Andrew Atkinson and Shannon Freitas, were very helpful in teaching me both about Southeast Alaskan culture as well as allowing me to further my knowledge as an environmental health professional.

My first major project was creating a “Manager’s Safety Handbook” for SEARHC. This handbook consists of many common compliance issues that the safety department has seen on SEARHC’s campus while doing routine inspections. Some of these topics include proper sharps containers procedures, formalin safety and maintenance for fire sprinklers. For each topic, I wrote an easy-to-understand information card for SEARHC employees to reference. Ms. Freitas helped me navigate through many resources to write the guidelines for these topics. At the end of my internship, I got to present my work to the hospital’s Environment of Care Team. This is a team of various SEARHC departments that meets to discuss how to better follow the standards of The Joint Commission (TJC). This handbook was made as a way to show TJC that SEARHC is committed to continuous readiness.



This internship also allowed me the opportunity to revise a job hazard analysis for the Raven's Way Wilderness Expedition Specialist position at SEARHC. Raven's Way is a substance abuse program for adolescents that involves week long wilderness expeditions as an integral part of treatment. The expedition specialists lead the program participants through kayaking, hiking and camping while also allowing time for treatment focus. In order to revise the job hazard analysis, I participated in an expedition with the program. Safety hazards for the Wilderness Expedition Specialists include dehydration, bear encounters, and injuries from lifting heavy gear. While on the expedition, my role was to take notes about these hazards and what safety procedures the expedition specialists were following, or should be following in the future, to minimize these risks. At the end of the trip I wrote my report and shared my findings with the expedition specialists and the supervisor of the Raven's Way program. I really enjoyed this project because it allowed me to meet dedicated staff and participants looking to better their lives. I know that the work I did will help keep both staff and participants safe in order to make treatment as effective as possible.



I also spent one week of my internship traveling to smaller Southeast Alaska communities to work on projects there. In Kake, AK and Hoonah, AK I worked with Mr. Atkinson on environmental tours of the clinics there. These communities were very small and unlike anywhere I have been before. It was a very interesting experience to meet people who live a very different lifestyle from what I am used to. While in these communities, I met many very kind people eager to teach me about their culture. During my time in Kake, Mr. Atkinson and I had the opportunity to attend the Keex' Kwaan Culture Camp. This is a summer camp that gives children a chance to learn about traditional practices and customs of Southeast Alaska natives. They participate in activities involving traditional cooking methods and artwork. The camp also allows presenters from all over Southeast Alaska to come and work with the children. At this camp, I lead two activities with the campers. The activities I lead were to educate the children on the importance of proper hand hygiene and to educate the children on how water treatment systems work and their importance in the community. I loved getting to teach kids about why environmental health is important and why I want to dedicate my career to it.

Overall, this internship was an amazing experience for me. I am really grateful to have gotten the opportunity to work at SEARHC. I have met so many great people and got to experience life in a town only accessible by boat or plane. I have learned a lot about environmental health and safety in a hospital setting and feel that this internship has prepared me for my next steps as an environmental health professional.