

**ENS Hayden Hamilton
JRCOSTEP Summer 2025
Oklahoma City Area Office
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma**

I am an undergraduate student at East Central University in Ada, OK, majoring in Environmental Health and Science. After graduating in December 2025, I plan to pursue a master's degree in Occupational Health and Safety. I have always had a passion for helping others, whether in public or professional settings, and I find the field of environmental health fascinating because of its diversity and impact. I enjoy improving the lives of others by helping to create safer environments.



ENS Hamilton inspecting a playground

It was my father, a former member of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, who first told me about the Junior Commissioned Officer Student Training and Extern Program (JRCOSTEP). His encouragement inspired me to apply. I was honored to be selected and assigned to the Indian Health Service (IHS) at the Oklahoma City Area Office (OCAO), located in my home state. The Oklahoma City Area (OCA) serves eight service units and more than 39 tribes across Oklahoma, Kansas, and parts of Texas.

During my externship, I worked under the mentorship of CDR David Bales, an Injury Prevention Specialist. I also had the privilege of collaborating with several dedicated environmental health professionals in the OCA, who shared their knowledge and encouraged my professional growth.



Inspecting a portable fire extinguisher

Through their guidance, I gained practical skills in many aspects of environmental health practice, including:

- Conducting food service sanitation surveys of tribal facilities
- Identifying playground and recreational area hazards
- Monitoring occupational exposures in healthcare settings
- Assessing fire safety and life safety systems
- Writing clear and accurate inspection reports

These skills are indispensable in ensuring the health and safety of tribal communities, and I came to understand how important it is for these services to be consistently provided to support compliance with standards and protect public health.

One of the most memorable aspects of my externship was the opportunity to assist CAPT (Retired) Chris Kates in monitoring anesthetic gas levels in an operating room. This work helped ensure that healthcare staff were working within safe exposure limits — an excellent example of how environmental health professionals protect both patients and employees in healthcare settings.

I also worked with IHS Sanitarian Davis Reardon to conduct inspections of tribal pools, playgrounds, and fire safety systems. These inspections involved checking pool chemical balances, evaluating playground structures for potential hazards, and ensuring that fire extinguishers and exits met safety requirements. Knowing that our efforts contributed to a safer environment for tribal members, especially children, was deeply rewarding.



Monitoring anesthetic gas levels in an operating room



Measuring the water chemistry of a swimming pool