Environmental Health Services

Healthy Environments = Healthy People

DEHS Directors' Meeting: 05 November 2026

Meeting recording available

Next conference call 04 February 2027 1:00-2:30PM ET

Area	Representative	Area	Representative
Alaska:	Hugh Denny	**Nashville:**	Michael Hiles
Albuquerque:	Kimberly Smith	**Navajo:**	*Not on call*
Bemidji:	*Not on call*	**Oklahoma:**	*Not on call*
Billings:	Darcy Merchant	**Phoenix:**	Dave Cramer
California:	Carolyn Garcia	**Portland:**	*Not on call*
Great Plains:	*Not on call*	**Tucson:**	Valeria Wyatt

Environmental Health Support Center: Jeff Dickson
DEHS HQ: Matt Albright; Sam Frank; Brain Hroch; Stephen Piontkowski; Andrea Tsatoke

1. **Welcome and Update (Matt Albright)**
    a. Area Consults
        i. CA Area Consult just completed in-person meeting November 2026
        ii. Albuquerque Area in-person meeting December 2026
        iii. Phoenix Area in-person meeting February 2027
        iv. Intend to share national trends at DEHS national meeting in May 2027
    b. IHS Organizational Realignment
        i. Proposal submitted to HHS
        ii. Keep eye out for agency communications (e.g. emails, town halls)
    c. Position Description Standardization
        i. Workgroup assembled & moving along
        ii. More later in this call
    d. Externs
        i. Exploring ORISE
        ii. EH profession on the IHS Extern/Scholarship list for 2027

2. **Area Highlights**
    a. Alaska
        i. Broad community impact: ANTHC & regional partners connect safe water & sanitation, healthy homes, air quality, waste management, injury prevention, & environmental stewardship
        ii. Local capacity & innovation: Highlights include village utility training & maintenance support, contaminated-site assessment, & YKHC's wastewater disease surveillance
        iii. Community resilience: Tribal EH teams support preparedness, disaster response, & recovery—protecting homes, drinking water, & essential infrastructure
        iv. ANTHC will hosts the Alaska Tribal Conference on Environmental Management, bringing tribal environmental professionals & partners

together for training, shared solutions, & collaboration in March/April 2027

v. Veterinary public health: USPHS Commissioned Corps veterinary officer completed a 120-day Alaska detail to assess service needs. Related bills, S. 620 & H.R. 8473, would support veterinary public health services in AK tribal communities; S. 620 has passed the Senate

b. Albuquerque – *submitted via email*
   i. Staffing
      - CDR Parris retired this summer
   ii. OEHE Annual Workshop last week
      - Session on emergency management & preparedness
   iii. Area Consult in-person meeting in December 2026
c. Bemidji – *Not on call*
d. Billings – *Not on call*
   i. Staffing
      - Area IP Specialist vacant since June 2026
        - Working with DCPS to post a PHS announcement
   ii. Crow Service Unit
      - Crow SU Sanitarian will transfer to Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes in January
      - Vacancy announcement forthcoming
   iii. TIPCAP
      - Two sites, Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes & Rocky Boy; both focusing on elder fall prevention
   iv. Lay Vaccinator Program
      - 10 new lay vaccinators from the Blackfeet Service Unit
      - Northern Arapaho Tribe interested
e. California
   i. Area Consult in-person meeting conducted this week
      - Good experience
      - Having Area Rep on Consult Team helpful & enhances engagement
   ii. Staffing
      - IEH Specialist vacancy announcement forthcoming
f. Great Plains – *Not on call*
g. Nashville
   i. Staffing
      - Michael Hiles, Director, DEHS, Nashville Area
      - Two vacancy announcements forthcoming
h. Navajo – *Not on call*
i. Oklahoma City – *Not on call*

j. Phoenix
    i. Staffing
        - Devin Temple completed pathway project (IEH at golf courses)
        - Kate Pink reported as District EHO, Eastern Arizona District Office
        - Jared Ellsworth reported to Whiteriver Service Unit
        - Cori Crocker transferred
        - Waiting on presidential appointments for a new CAD hire & 2 PHX civilians converting to PHS
    ii. Tonto Apache Tribe compacted EH
    iii. EH
        - Salt River adopted WebEHRS; Chelsey Vega trained them how to use it
        - Focused effort on completing water/wastewater surveys
        - Heavy rains resulted in a water outage at the HHCC & flooding on the Ft. Apache Reservation
    iv. IP
        - Presented at Phoenix CHR Summitt
            - Interest in DEHS presenting at National CHR Summitt
        - Will host IVP Fellowship Field Course at Reno/Sparks Indian Community in 2027
        - Kayla Jackson instructed a CPST Course at SRPMIC resulting in 15 new CPS techs
        - LT Wyatt assisted CA Area with IVP Course 1; 25 in attendance
        - PHX anticipates four IVP Fellowship applicants this coming cycle including a TIPCAP recipient
k. Portland – *Not on call*

l. Tucson
   i. Finalizing annual report for our tribes - get more visibility for services Indian Health Service and the services we provide;
      - Emphasizing we are consulting/ education /partnership based vs enforcement and want to provide a comprehensive document about our program
   ii. Identifying gaps in Tucson EHSB program and how they relate to Area Consult
      - Helped us see some of our blind spots & areas we can develop
   iii. EH
      - Certified Food Protection Manager Course
         - Exploring more coordination with Pima County to benefit tribal members & general public
         - This moving forward is directly tied to leadership support at LHD
      - Determining if we can do reciprocal in person food handler training certificates with Pima County
         - The food handler course the county teaches is not ANAB accredited - neither is ours
      - Haven't been getting a lot of response/buy-in from tribe related to food safety but if I.H.S. can better align with Pima county naturally what the tribe receives is also aligned with what Pima county requires & reduces some of the issues with cross jurisdiction food safety concerns
      - Pima Co. hosting quarterly calls with TON and I.H.S to discuss collaboration from EH standpoint

m. EHSC
   i. Exploring sanitary survey training
   ii. Competency Model: finalizing; populating recommended trainings; working with IT on user acceptance testing of the site
   iii. Healthy Homes equipment: most Areas should have received their equipment; contact Braden if any issues; two courses scheduled for FY27
   iv. Food Safety Modernization: team received the 2025 IHS Director's Award; work continues on adoption of food safety standardization
   v. FY27 Training Calendar: will be released soon; dates & offerings subject to change
   vi. OEHE Orientation Course 2027: 35 people registered (3 are EHS); work is underway to revamp the program
   vii. REHS Study Workgroup: begins January 2027

3. **HQ Announcements**
    a. Injury prevention (Andrea Tsatoke)
        i. Fellowship [2027-2028 cohort]
            - Applications open
            - Those interested in applying must complete a pre-application consult with the IP Academic Advisors (UNC) no later than 18 November
            - Applications are due 13 December
            - Applicants will be notified of their acceptance into the program by 18 December



        ii. 2026 Rick Smith Injury Prevention Award
            - Nominations due to CDR Molly Madson by 05 February 2027
        iii. TIPCAP
            - Non-competing continuation application
                - Template available
                - Required for sites to continue Year 2 funding
                - TIPCAP Office Hours provided
            - Semi-Annual calls completed
            - TIPCAP Program Guide 2026
            - First 6 months highlights (infographic)
                - Congrats to TIPCAP Pos for receiving the HHS Outstanding Innovative Workforce Solution Award



b. Institutional EH (Brian Hroch)
    i. Annual meeting
        - 05-08 August 2026, Minneapolis, MN
        - Follows American Society for Health Care Engineering conference
            - Conference Presentation by Conner, Franks & Hroch, *"Retro Dashboard, Real Results: Taming the Physical Environment"*
        - Facilitation by Jeff Dickson, CDR Jeff Conner meeting co-lead
        - Reviewed, assessed & prioritized 2025/2026 IEH Program Priorities for 2026/2027
        - Quarterly call 23 September
        - Resulted in the addition of two additional Program Priorities
        - Radiation Protection
            - Led by ANTHC's Forrest Collins
            - Members include Cook, Fish, Murga, Peaches
        - Plan Reviews for Healthcare Facilities
            - Led by CDR John Hansen
            - Members include Peaches, Williams
        - Preparing for 2027 annual meeting
    ii. IEH Workforce Development
        - USUHS IEH Residency
            - Continue to pursue updated MOA for future residents
        - Filed-based Residency
            - OEHE Directors Meeting presentation by: Reed, Albright (15 September)
            - LT Pierre first IEH Field-Based Resident
                - Completed first semester at MT Tech
                - NNMC activities
                    I. Ergonomics Assessment of Sterile Processing Department
                    II. Accreditation TDY support with Yolanda Williams, Jeff Conner & Ken Franks
                    III. Safety systems engineering project
                - Participated in ASHE Conference & Annual IEH Meeting
                - NFPA 101 Course
            - Next cycle for Summer 2027 approved
                - Application window open 29 October – 30 November 2026
    iii. Professional development
        - EHSC courses (Conner*)
            - IEHOs from hosting Areas, OQ & HQ

- Accreditation 360 (completed=Virtual, 8/26, 9/26; scheduled=ABQ 11/26)
- Hospital & Ambulatory Courses (completed, Keizer, OR, 26 October)
- OEHE Orientation Course with Safety Officer track
  - Albuquerque
  - 12-16 April 2027

- SOFR Office Hours held monthly
- Competency development for SOFRs & IEHOs
  - Conner, Cook, Hiles

iv. IH Protocols
- Calvert, Collins, Cook, Kates, Murga, Strauss, Hroch
- Nitrous oxide completed & distributed
- In progress
  - TBD

v. Staffing management
- IEH position templates, including PDs, other HR documents
  - Hroch, Lewelling, Murga, Peaches
- SOFR position templates, including PDs, other HR documents
  - Hansen, Hroch, Lewelling, Murga, Peaches, need a lead

i. EC/LS Dashboard Development & Pilot Testing (in progress)
- Conner, Franks, Hroch, Wiggins, Williams, Box, Fish, Hiles, Lewis, Wildcat
- Areas: BE; BI; GP; NV (with plans for AQ & PO)
- Next phase: Market research

ii. PCRA/ICRA 2.0
- PCRA - Pre-Construction Risk Assessment
- ICRA - Infection Control Risk Assessment
- Cook, Box, Conner, Denherder, Fish, Strauss, [Bryan] Reed, Kelly Andrews (Office of Quality)

iii. I-STAR (on-going)
- Murga, Hroch, Franks

iv. NIOSH Health Hazard Evaluations & Technical Assistance
- Dental Nitrous Oxide, Oklahoma City Area Dental Programs
- Dental Noise Exposure, Radiation Protection, Fall Protection, SFC Safety Program

v. OSHA Activities
- Complaints, inspections

vi. Accreditation readiness
- Conner, Cook, Franks, Hansen, Hroch, Murga, Peaches, Williams & others
- National Council of Healthcare Safety & Engineering Professionals (NCHSEP)

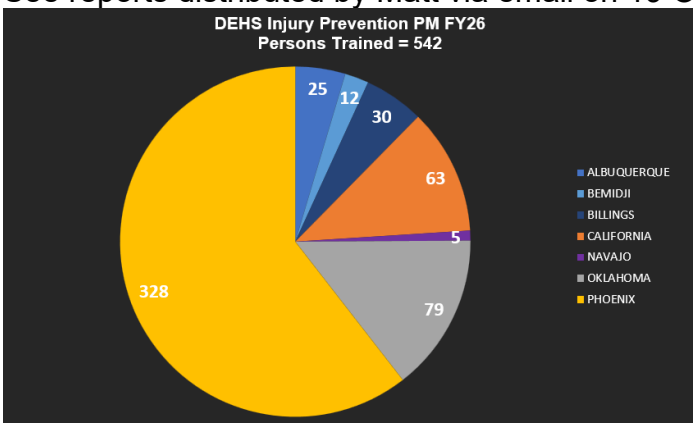
vi. EHS Healthy Homes & IEH IEQ/IAQ Equipment

- Hickey, Hroch, Conner with input from DEHS & IEH
- Acquisitions to start in FY27 with Jeff Dickson

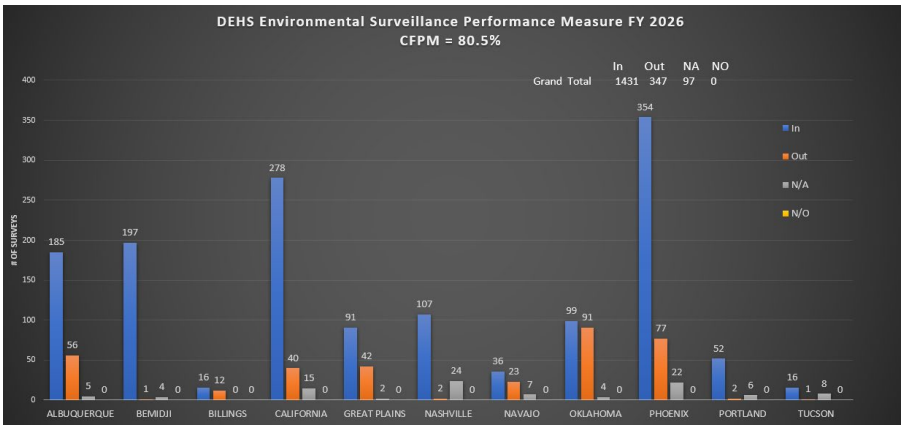
vii. CAPT Tim Jiggens reported to GIMC as Safety Officer

c. Performance Measures update (Sam Frank)

i. See reports distributed by Matt via email on 19 October 2026



Please ensure one entry per training event



d. Position Descriptions Update (Matt Albright)

i. Collected all PDs for DEHS Positions

- DEHS Director
- Area IEHO (Supervisory & Non-Supervisory)
- Area IEHO Consultant
- Area Supervisory IP Specialist
- Area IP Specialist
- District EHS
- Area EH Consultant
- Sr. EHS
- Field EHS

ii. Used OHR's MIRON GPT to create PDs from all PDs collected from Area DEHS programs

iii. Formed workgroup to review

iv. Reviews will be completed in January 2027

v. OHR will certify & have ready to use after reviews completed

e. Building a Better EHS (Matt Albright)
   i. DEHS is proposing a working session for the Annual Meeting in May to develop a structured standardized "program" for preparing DEHS employees
   ii. Structured from a perspective of entry on duty, mid-career, & supervisory career with options for IEH & IP
   iii. Will be coordinated with the competency model for evaluation
   iv. The ask now is to review the proposal for awareness & start thinking about your own programs to see what you are doing & any gaps you have identified

f. Miscellaneous (Matt Albright)

See forthcoming emails to Area DEHS Directors for details

   i. COSTEP & [Civil Service] EH Externs
      - Selection & placement ongoing
      - Exploring ORISE
   ii. 31 December
      - Staffing report
      - Area description
      - Photo contest pics
   iii. 05 January
      - EH Specialist of the Year Award nominations
   iv. 29 January
      - Posters
   v. 05 February
      - Gefroh Health & Safety Award nominations
      - Smith Injury Prevention Award nominations

g. Reminders (Matt Albright)
    i. Take great pics
        - DEHS photo contest
        - EHOs in Action Photo Book
    ii. Area DEHS & Week-in-Review
        - Submissions
            - Email to ihspublicaffairsstaff@ihs.gov
            - Due Thursdays by 1300 ET
        - January: Alaska
        - February: Albuquerque
        - March: Bemidji
        - April: Billings
        - May: California
        - June: Great Plains
        - July: Nashville
        - August: Navajo
        - September: Oklahoma City
        - October: Phoenix
        - November: Portland
        - December: Tucson

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