

**ENS Mikayla Deardorff  
Jr COSTEP Summer 2011  
Western Carolina University  
Phoenix Area Office  
Phoenix, AZ**

My name is Mikayla Deardorff. I am a rising senior at Western Carolina University in North Carolina. I am pursuing a degree in Environmental Health with minors in Chemistry and Leadership studies. I learned about the USPHS and the CoSTEP program through a professor at Western Carolina University. I was immediately up for the challenge and thought that it would be something I would like to pursue. This summer, I was a CoSTEP with the Indian Health Service (IHS) Phoenix Area office. I worked at the Office of Environmental Health and Engineering in their Institutional Environmental Health Program. My preceptor was CDR Ricardo Murga. Being located in the Phoenix Area office gave me exposure to many different tribes and field areas in the region. I was able to get a good view of what a career path with IHS would look like. This experience was filled with a dynamite combination of hands on experience and training in disease prevention, radiological health, industrial hygiene, food safety, injury prevention and education, and emergency preparedness.



One area of field that I focused on a great deal this summer was Emergency Preparedness. I traveled with CDR David Cramer to the Hopi reservation to help teach a three hour training course on First Receivers. The training consisted of a PowerPoint that addressed potential hazards and how to recognize them, proper personal protective equipment (PPE), triage and safety. The training also consisted of donning and doffing of PPE and the deployment of the decontamination tent. I was a control for a radiation decontamination exercise at Phoenix Area Medical Center (PIMC). This exercise required full deployment of the decon team. As a controller my job was to “stress” the system and inject scenarios at specific times during the exercise. I was also able to attend the Arizona Hospital Evacuation Conference in June. This conference focused on issues associated with hospital and public health preparedness, including the challenges of evacuating a health care facility. With all the exposure to emergency preparedness I researched and submitted an article to The IHS Provider about single



patient decontamination. The article discussed the OSHA Best Practices for Hospital Based First Receivers and made recommendations for what IHS healthcare facilities should do to prepare for a single patient decontamination, including updating their Decontamination Emergency Operations plan, maintaining appropriate supplies and equipment, as well as coordinating the proper training. I came into this internship with little class background on this topic and have gained more knowledge than any one class could teach me. I really enjoyed having training in this field because there are so many aspects to it and can be a challenge in times of emergencies.

Another part of my summer was doing community based Environmental Health which included surveys. This allowed me to go out into the field and work with the individual tribes. I was able to help assist in a variety of surveys from food establishments to elderly home inspections. My first food inspection was at Grand Canyon West with LTJG David Bales and ENS Richard Greene. There I learned firsthand how to conduct a proper food survey and to write a report. Later on in the summer I was able to

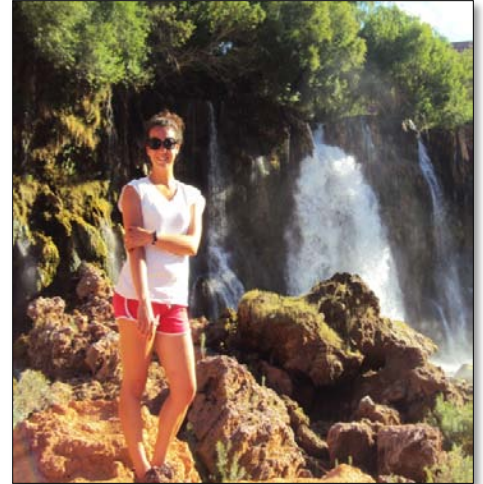
help teach the food handlers class with ENS Richard Greene and was able to break down the material and present it in a way people could understand. I worked with Ms. Mistin Ray on performing Elderly home surveys

at Ak-Chin Indian reservation were we were able to visit one on one with residents on a personal level and help meet their most pressing needs.

Institutional Environmental Health was another field of study that I spent a majority of my training. I traveled with CDR David Cramer and LT Molly Madson to Bishop California where we conducted dental X ray surveys, a mock AAAHC accreditation survey and fit tested health care workers. I was able to learn about industrial hygiene and the Life Safety codes which illustrated all the different components that must be reviewed and considered by hospitals before accreditation. I assisted CAPT (ret.)Greg Heck in hazard surveillance rounds at PIMC where a whole new chapter of codes and components were brought to my attention. I assisted CDR Ricardo Murga with a casino survey which implemented a new checklist for doing Life Safety Code surveys. I also assisted him on three other surveys conducted at the San Carlos Indian Hospital in the San Carlos Apache Reservation. We surveyed two medical x-ray units, conducted a sound exposure assessment, and verified ventilation and pressure relationship requirements for the isolation rooms.

Not every day was a day out in the blazing sun. My days in the office consisted of writing reports, ordering equipment, sending in equipment to get calibrated and more. My writing skills were enhance in a manner that was precise and condensed. I was able to juggle multiple tasks, learn how to use my resources at hand and get tasks done in a timely manner. Days in the office also gave me the opportunity to get to know fellow officers on a personal and professional level.

I was able to travel to some great places in Arizona during my CoSTEP experience. I traveled to the Havasupai village at the bottom of the Grand Canyon with LT Sarah-Jean Snyder and ENS Richard Greene. We conducted food surveys, trapped for mosquitoes, taught a food handlers class, and met with the animal control officer about rabies vaccinations and the upcoming spay and neuter clinic. While down there I was able to visit one of Arizona's best kept secrets, Havasupai and Mooney falls.



During my time off I was able to hike some incredible trails and explore the city of Phoenix. I had a lot of "first" times out in Phoenix. I went to a casino not just for a survey but for lights and games, went wakeboarding, camped out, jet skied and much more.

This experience has given me opportunities that few people have had. I was able to enjoy one of the seven natural wonders of world, and do work at the same time. I am so thankful that I was selected for this opportunity to learn, be challenged, and experience. Every day I looked forward to what the day would hold. Being located in the Area Office it gave me a broad view of the Indian Health Service on a field level and management level. I really enjoyed being able to work with the individual tribes on a personal level and being able to see that a difference was being made. I am walking away from this experience knowing what is expected of an Environmental Health officer and with a glimpse into the life of a Public Health Service officer. In the IHS Environmental Health Officers are faced with many cultural differences and must be able to create a personal relationship with the tribal members and gain their respect and must be knowledgeable in the field. Pursuing a career as an Environmental Health Officer would be a time of endless learning, exciting locations, and great career opportunities. It was easy to see that the people that I met and worked with are passionate and committed to protecting and improving the life on Indian Reservations.

I could not have asked for a better experience and thank my preceptor, CDR Ricardo Murga for all his help and the time that he invested in me and CDR David Cramer for his expertise and involvement in my experience. This experience will be a topic that I will talk about for years and I highly encourage any uprising Environmental Health student who wants to use their knowledge to have an impact in people's lives and be challenged on a daily bases, to consider the United States Public Health Service for a CoSTEP opportunity or even a career.