



Customer Services Division



**Our Environment.
Our Future.**

Our Environment. Our Future.

The name of the division says it all: Customer Services Division (CSD). The customers that CSD assists include citizens of the state, business, industry, local government, other governmental entities and the agency's own air, land, local services and water divisions. The services that CSD provides include: laboratory analysis and accreditation, help with sample collection and data interpretation, assistance with planning for and responding to emergencies, permitting information for small businesses as well as industries that are locating or expanding operations in Oklahoma, information about mercury in the state's fish, special meetings for public input into permitting, and answering many questions and concerns that Oklahoma residents have about our environment now and in the future. The stories in CSD's portion of the Annual Report illustrate these activities. ■

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Assistance Provided to Public Water Supplies

Introducing a New **SAMPLE LABELING SYSTEM**

**MAKE SURE SAMPLE NUMBER
ON LABEL AND CHAIN OF
CUSTODY FORM MATCH, AND
CONTAINER TYPE.**

**CONFIRM INFORMATION ON
THE LABEL IS CORRECT.**

**PLEASE APPLY THE LABEL
VERTICALLY ON THE BOTTLE, SO WE
CAN SCAN THE BAR CODE EASILY!**



Public water supplies are required by federal law to monitor the quality of water provided to the public. CSD is instrumental in helping public water supplies throughout Oklahoma deliver clean, safe drinking water to citizens. Analyses of public water supply samples account for more than 60 percent of the work done by the State Environmental Laboratory.

CSD's role in providing customer assistance to Oklahoma's public water supplies is vast. CSD employees provide public water supply systems with instructions on proper sample collection through various means ranging from helpful written instruction materials, to training for operators, to one-on-one consultation to answer questions. Details such as container size and type, shipping and preservation times as well as holding times vary depending on individual analytes to be measured. It is crucial for CSD staff to schedule laboratory time appropriately based on capacity to ensure that systems are able to meet compliance schedules.

CSD staff are well versed in each step of the collection and analysis process. Their assistance to public water supplies helps to reduce sample collection error, thereby saving money for the public water supply systems.

Sample collection can often be a complicated process, so it is imperative that public water supplies have accurate information in order to deliver quality samples. Through CSD's customer assistance in how, when and where samples must be collected, public water supplies are able to quickly and efficiently submit water samples and have results on which they can rely. ■

Protecting Oklahoma Citizens in the Event of a Chemical Accident

A tornado roars through town and hits the local co-op. A tanker truck overturns on the highway. Lightning strikes a tank battery. A fire at the water treatment plant causes the chlorine tank to leak. All these emergencies involve chemicals that threaten the safety and security of the public. The local community emergency responders know what to do because, with help from DEQ, they have planned and practiced for such events.

DEQ has the only one-stop shop for reporting hazardous chemical inventories in the United States. Federal law requires all facilities that store dangerous chemicals in large amounts to report to the state, the county and the local fire department so that emergency plans can be made in case of an accident. In Oklahoma, thanks to online reporting, DEQ collects and distributes that information to all counties and local fire departments in an electronic format which can be uploaded into emergency management software. Vital information needed for planning can be accessed quickly and easily. The information provided by DEQ can then be integrated with local data including evacuation routes, community infrastructure, emergency contacts and locations of vulnerable population groups to create a workable plan for responding to chemical accidents. DEQ works diligently to help companies report this necessary information and

to make sure that information gets to local planners. Last year more than 46,000 reports of chemical storage locations were received by DEQ and distributed across Oklahoma to the local responders who use the information to be prepared for chemical emergencies.

Getting the information on chemicals to planners is not the only emergency assistance DEQ provides to communities. DEQ also trains local first responders on the use of CAMEO, Computer Aided Management of Emergency Operations. CAMEO allows responders to map the projected movement of a chemical release across a community. This means the responders can quickly determine appropriate evacuation routes and other response actions. CAMEO can also provide information on the hazards of the chemical released so responders can protect themselves as they protect the public. In FY 2011, DEQ trained 200 first responders on the use of CAMEO. This included introductory training as well as advanced training. Responders can practice accessing and acting on information before they are faced with a crisis.

By providing chemical information to communities for incorporation into emergency plans and then providing training to first responders so they can use that information, DEQ helps protect Oklahoma citizens when the tornado hits, the truck overturns, the lightning strikes or the tank leaks. ■



DEQ works with community emergency responders to prepare for diesel spills like this one on Sara Road, in Oklahoma City, in March 2011.



Stan Johnson, in the Laboratory Customer Assistance Section, takes a sample from one of several Oklahoma citizens that submit samples daily.

CSD Reaches Out to Oklahomans

There are many reasons for citizens to seek help from DEQ in determining whether their water well produces safe water. Whether questions regarding water safety are brought about by a news story discussing water contamination or an individual buying or selling a house, the DEQ Laboratory Customer Assistance Section is always ready to help. Citizens can call CSD's toll-free number, (800) 869-1400, to reach a knowledgeable and friendly staff person who will work with them to address their concerns from beginning to end. This help includes advice on the type of container to use for sample collection, how much water to collect, where to bring samples to be analyzed, and interpretation of the results of laboratory analysis. From the simplification of sampling procedures, to the development of fact sheets to help citizens understand health concerns and sample results, DEQ strives to provide outstanding customer service to the citizens of Oklahoma.

Occasionally a citizen has greater needs than simply assistance with a water sample. The Laboratory Customer Assistance Section often takes the lead in

addressing citizen complaints where complex issues are involved. The chief purpose of this group is to provide technical assistance and to facilitate communication between the citizen and the various divisions of DEQ. The Laboratory Customer Assistance staff has diverse expertise covering multiple subjects, not just sampling and laboratory analysis. Staff members communicate complex, scientific information to the public in a way that is easily understood. The Laboratory Customer Assistance Section can provide solutions to difficult problems that are often a source of worry for citizens. An example of this was the response to the elevated levels of naturally occurring uranium in private wells in the Central Oklahoma Aquifer. DEQ has no regulatory oversight for those utilizing their own private wells for drinking water. However, when testing found that there were areas in eastern Logan County where levels of uranium exceeded what is allowed for a public water supply, CSD initiated a multi-media outreach which included meetings with the public. DEQ distributed fact sheets, offered reduced prices for water well analysis to those living within the boundaries of the affected area,

and had numerous phone consultations to assist those most affected.

Another way that CSD assists citizens is through conducting public meetings. Some of these meetings are held due to changes in how the state implements a federal program, such as changes in how DEQ applies water quality standards in the permitting process. More often the meetings are held to give the public an opportunity to comment on a specific permit action. DEQ rules contain risk-based definitions to determine which permits pose the greatest potential hazard to the environment and are of most concern to the public. CSD staff facilitates the meetings to create an open atmosphere for the public to voice those concerns about permit actions. CSD transmits the concerns to permitting staff for consideration in making permitting decisions.

Customer assistance is vital to DEQ. CSD staff interact with and provide a much needed service to Oklahomans. ■

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Increasing Environmental Compliance and Attracting Businesses to Oklahoma

Environmental regulations can often be confusing to companies, especially small businesses without full-time environmental staff. To help Oklahoma companies achieve environmental compliance, CSD has developed assistance teams that work with businesses to make sense of environmental rules and help them comply with regulations.

In 2010, these intra-agency teams led by CSD provided information and direction to more than 30 companies and 5 industry groups. In addition, CSD staff held 10 seminars across the state to help companies comply with the Community Right-to-Know regulations. As a result of this effort, more than 46,000 Hazardous Chemical Inventories were received by DEQ by the March 1st deadline. This not only fulfills a statutory obligation by the reporting companies but also provides accurate information on chemical hazards to local emergency responders. This high level of compliance benefits both the state and its industrial base.

A major goal of the agency is to assist new and expanding businesses meet applicable rules in a cost-effective manner. In FY 2011, CSD's industry assistance program focused on developing working relationships with the Department of Commerce and higher education institutions to create a unified process for industry recruitment within the state.

Mike Fry with the Oklahoma Department of Commerce sums it up this way, "Over the years, working business location projects can sometimes contain sensitive issues

regarding permitting and regulations. These environmental regulations are designed to foster the protection and conservation of our state's natural resources.

Through DEQ's teamwork and being professionally prepared, many of my clients have commented very positively on the manner in which DEQ has presented information and answered questions for new business projects. It is always a pleasure to have the DEQ team represented at the table with our business clients."

Through partnerships with other agencies, CSD enhanced the level of customer satisfaction from industry by making sure they understand all the environmental requirements of doing business in Oklahoma and making it less cumbersome to meet those requirements. This effort has created a state where companies want to bring their business. ■

Malarkey is one of several companies DEQ assisted with permit requirements.



DEQ Samples Fish for Mercury

In July 2010, DEQ issued fish consumption advisories for 16 lakes in Oklahoma. These advisories were the result of a 2-year survey of mercury levels in fish from 50 lakes across the state. The survey showed that lakes in southeast Oklahoma had consistently higher levels of mercury in fish than other areas of the state. This is likely due to higher levels of mercury deposition in this area and water quality conditions that are conducive to making the mercury available to the food web.

CSD worked with other agencies and stakeholders such as the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) and the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) to craft a message that encouraged people to continue to fish and eat the fish that they catch, but to also make smart decisions about the fish they choose to eat and feed their families. CSD held a series of public meetings in areas affected by the advisories to inform the local citizens and answer their questions. Numerous radio and television interviews were also given in an effort to get the word out about the advisories.

CSD plans to retest the lakes included in the original survey that screened at levels high enough to cause concern. Approximately 40 smaller lakes that are vulnerable to mercury contamination have also been targeted for sampling, as funding allows. ■

A fish biopsy for the mercury in fish study.





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