

# Customer Services

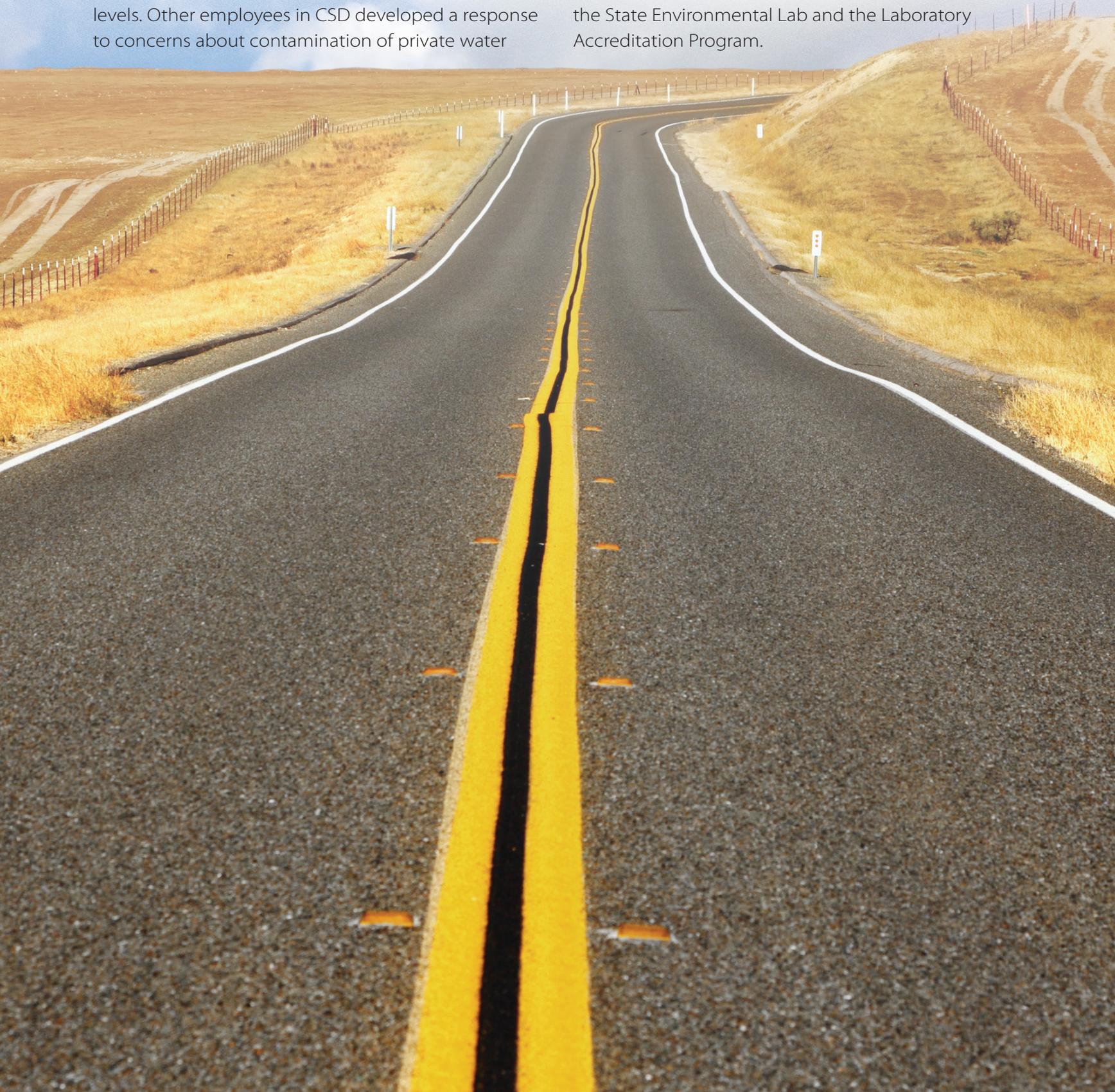


**A NEW Decade: A *NEW* Environment**

# Customer Services: Putting the Pieces Together

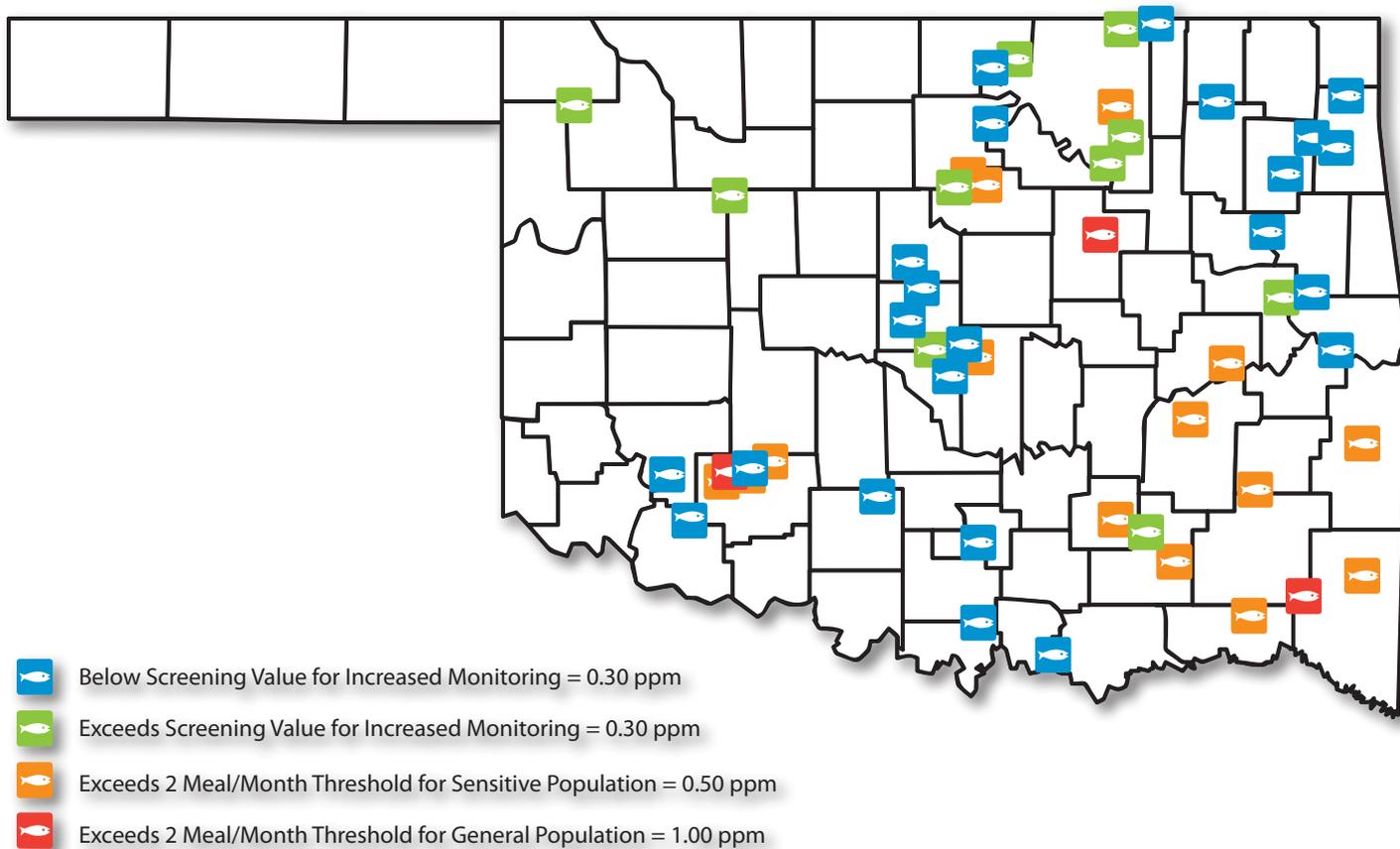
**T**he Customer Services Division (CSD) is the spot within DEQ where things come together. In fiscal year 2010, staff members compiled a master list of all regulated facilities, wrote a continuity of operations plan in case of a disaster and addressed workforce safety needs. In other instances, the division focused on external environmental issues, such as coordinating air and water programs to identify lakes where fish have increased mercury levels. Other employees in CSD developed a response to concerns about contamination of private water

wells near Locust Grove and found a new way to assist small communities with their water and wastewater problems. The division also worked with other agencies to find a way to limit human exposure to harmful bacteria while promoting the Oklahoma River for recreational activities. In 2010, CSD facilitated cooperation between agency divisions as well as between the agency and other state agencies and the public on a multitude of issues, while also supporting the State Environmental Lab and the Laboratory Accreditation Program.



# Fishing for Information

## Locations Where Mercury Concentrations in Largemouth Bass Were Below or Above Oklahoma DEQ Mercury Thresholds

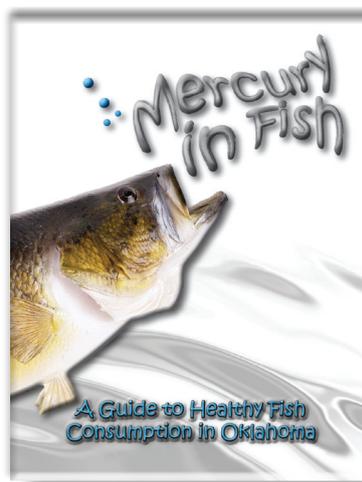


**A**fter assessing mercury levels in fish in Oklahoma lakes for two years, in early summer 2010 the Customer Services Division (CSD) advised people where consumption of certain types and quantities of fish should be limited.

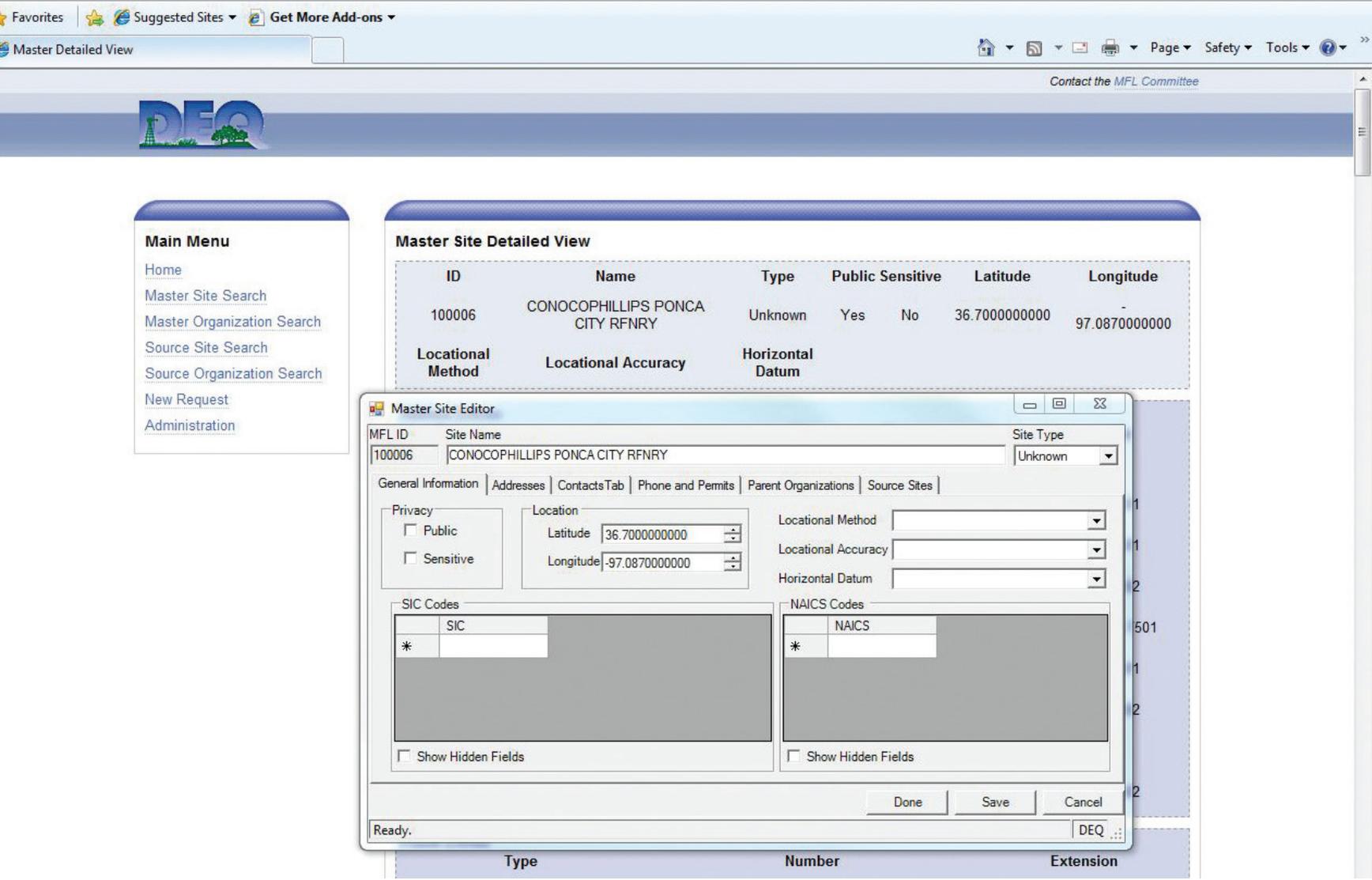
CSD, in conjunction with the Air Quality Division (AQD), developed a screening study to detect mercury in largemouth bass at 50 state lakes. If the bass were found to have high levels of mercury during the screening, all available game fish species for that lake were resampled. DEQ collaborated on the resample efforts with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

In late 2009, CSD collected samples from 21 lakes. Within these lakes, 16 different species were collected for a total of 307 samples. CSD also collected 11 samples of 5 different species of fish from 4 different streams. The Wildlife Department collected 926 samples of 21 species of fish from 25 lakes. All the samples were analyzed by the State Environmental Laboratory.

When the consumption advice was issued, it included specific information about lakes and species. The fish data, along with AQD mercury deposition information, will be used to map geographic distribution patterns in Oklahoma. AQD can also use this information to evaluate baseline conditions prior to the implementation of mercury emission controls on utilities and industry.



The Mercury in Fish guide can be found on the DEQ Web site with all the lake advisories in the state of Oklahoma.



The Master Facility List, a central database, was developed into a program to solve communication problems between different divisions at DEQ.

## Making a Master List

The Master Facility List, better known as the MFL, is a program developed to solve a problem common to many large organizations: lack of uniformity in data handling. Different divisions processed data as independent systems and did not communicate with one another, particularly with regard to how a facility was named or where it was located. The MFL was developed to be a central database where each unique facility would be given an ID number – based on its location and name – and this number would be applied across division lines. In the new decade, all records will reference and connect to the MFL and it will become the “agency” database.

The MFL comes with many benefits, including aiding in DEQ’s efforts to reduce the use of paper

and hard copies of records. Standardized numbers will facilitate electronic storage and retrieval of records. Another use of the MFL, currently under development, is the electronic submittal of information to DEQ. Application forms, compliance records and other information may be able to be submitted in electronic form, further eliminating the use of paper. The MFL will also be used as the basis for geographic mapping of DEQ’s permitted facilities.

A long-term goal for the MFL is to provide direct public access to portions of DEQ’s electronic data files. This would allow for individual searches to identify facilities either by name or by location. Users would also be able to have access to the records for a facility or area without having to make search requests or review paper files at DEQ headquarters.



Monty Elder gives a presentation on COOP to agency staff.

## COOP - Planning and Preparing for the Worst

**W**hen disaster strikes, DEQ provides valuable assistance to Oklahoma citizens and communities. But what if a tornado, ice storm, explosion or pandemic hit DEQ's Oklahoma City headquarters or staff members? How will DEQ protect the state's environment? These important questions are addressed in DEQ's Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP).

The COOP process is mandated for government agencies by both federal and state executive orders. DEQ began the process of planning for the worst by determining what essential functions cannot be interrupted. Upper-level managers determined these include protecting the public water supply, assessing damaged facilities, monitoring air, land and water and communicating information on environmental conditions to the staff and the public. In addition, staff members also must maintain human resource functions and continue providing complaint investigation, emergency permitting and technical assistance to regulated facilities.

The next step in the COOP process was to write a plan outlining how those functions would be

fulfilled if the DEQ building could not be occupied, if upper managers were unavailable and if access to vital records was disrupted. The COOP plan also determined who was needed to perform essential functions, how notifications of emergency situations would be made and what DEQ staff members needed to know to secure their safety.

The COOP plan was finalized in December 2009, but the plan was only the first part of the preparation process. The next step was to make sure DEQ staff was aware of the plan and their roles in an emergency. Training for the COOP plan began during the spring 2010. DEQ staff members will be discussing situations which might call for activation of the plan during a tabletop exercise planned for summer 2010. DEQ staff will then physically migrate to an alternate location to determine if essential functions can be performed under duress. COOP planning will be ongoing in the next decade. Even if disaster strikes, the essential job of protecting the health of citizens and the environment will continue - thanks to the carefully considered COOP process.



*The Agency Safety Committee recommended the installation of emergency defibrillators.*

## Panels Help Safeguard Employees

**P**rotecting the public from a wide range of man-made and natural hazards in the environment is one of the core missions of DEQ. However, fulfilling this mission often places DEQ personnel at risk of being exposed to the very same hazards. Protecting employees is the mission of three safety committees, all of which are employee-driven. The committees cover normal operations in building facilities, specialized State Environmental Laboratory operations and activities of field personnel working throughout the state. From time to time, special committees are also assembled to deal with special situations, such as the 2009 Novel Influenza (H1N1) Pandemic.

Each safety committee is composed primarily of employees who are actively working in areas covered

by the committee. Each committee also is supported by a division director and key management leaders who serve as mentors. Through this unique system, employees both develop safety guidance and programs and help to implement them.

The success of safety programs is often measured by days without injury, and DEQ's rate is consistently low. Injury prevention is just one aspect of the complete safety program. Critical activities also include emergency preparedness, safety training, wellness and process safety management, particularly in technical activities. For example, life-saving automated external defibrillators were installed in the central office in FY 2010 – another step taken toward being prepared for an emergency.



*Left to right: Judy Duncan, David Caldwell and Barbara Rauch prepare to brief the Laboratory Services Advisory Council on steps necessary for TNI accreditation.*

## Improving the Quality of Oklahoma Environmental Laboratories

**T**he Laboratory Accreditation Program in the Customer Services Division (CSD) is developing an application to be recognized by The NELAC Institute (TNI) and began, in FY 2010, to take a proactive approach to accreditation assessments for Oklahoma environmental laboratories. TNI is a national, non-profit organization that fosters the generation of environmental data of known and documented quality.

TNI brings together stakeholders from accreditation programs, laboratories and other operations to develop consensus standards for laboratory accreditation and to operate a system that recognizes Accreditation Bodies that agree to accredit labs using the TNI standards. As with many similar programs, accreditation of labs assures that they strictly follow quality standards, which lead to a better and more reliable product. In this case, the data is used to make decisions about protection of human health and the environment.

For the FY 2010 accreditation, DEQ legal and management staff members met every other week to develop statutory language and operating procedures to comply with TNI requirements, which are based upon international standards for accreditation of laboratories. As a result of these meetings the Laboratory Accreditation Program developed statutory language for mutual recognition of accredited laboratories with other states. This proposal was passed and signed by the Governor April 9, 2010. Several program operating procedures have been developed and approved to aid the program in meeting The NELAC Institute requirements.

The next step will be for the Laboratory Services Advisory Council and the Environmental Quality Board to adopt rules changes. Following this, DEQ will apply for accreditation in 2011 and implement the TNI approved program in 2012.

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