

# Land Protection



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



# Where Every Day is Earth Day

*"The ultimate test of man's conscience may be his willingness to sacrifice something today for future generations whose words of thanks will not be heard." ~ Gaylord Nelson, former governor of Wisconsin and founder of Earth Day*

**A**ll life on this planet is connected in some form. Individuals can no longer remain oblivious to events outside their own backyard. Everyone has a role to play in protecting the world's fast-diminishing, nonrenewable resources – for ourselves and for generations to come. The new decade is filled with endless opportunities to put concepts like sustainability and environmental stewardship into daily practice. Everyone has the potential to use less, recycle more, and manage waste

appropriately and responsibly. The Land Protection Division (LPD) supports ecologically sensitive land management and development by regulating the disposal of solid waste, hazardous and non-hazardous waste, discarded tires, biomedical wastes and certain radiation sources. The division also oversees cleanup and reuse of contaminated properties. In addition, LPD assists with household and commercial recycling programs and coordinates environmental education for the public and students of all ages.

# MAPS Points the Way to the Awards



*Left to right: Oklahoma City Assistant City Manager James E. Thompson, DEQ Executive Director Steve Thompson, Oklahoma City Planning Department Director Russell Claus, Former Oklahoma City Mayor Kirk Humphreys, Oklahoma Secretary of Environment J.D. Strong.*



*Left to right: DEQ Environmental Programs Specialist Lloyd Kirk, Oklahoma City Planning Department Director Russell Claus.*

**T**he Oklahoma City Metropolitan Area Projects (MAPS) was awarded the 2009 Phoenix Award for Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 6, as well as the 2009 Brownfield Renewal Award in the economic impact category. The Phoenix Awards are widely recognized as the premiere award for achievement in Brownfield redevelopment. Certain parcels of land in the overall MAPS redevelopment area were investigated and cleaned up under the authority of DEQ's Brownfields Program.

The Phoenix Awards recognize innovative, yet practical remediation projects, which bring blighted commercial and industrial sites back to productive

use. The 2009 Brownfield Renewal Award was a new award presented by the "Brownfield Renewal" magazine, a national publication. The awards were presented to Oklahoma City representatives during a special ceremony at the National Brownfields Conference, held in New Orleans in November 2009.

The judges said that MAPS, which included the construction of the AT&T Bricktown Ballpark and the renovation of the Civic Center Music Hall, was selected for the awards "because of the way that the innovative public-private partnership transformed the community's economic base and image from its industrial past to a new destination point."

# Encouraging Conservation in Oklahoma through Agency Partnership



*The Encouraging Conservation in Oklahoma (ECO) program strives to promote sustainable travel practices in Oklahoma.*

Oklahoma's natural resources are among its most important tourism assets. Preserving them for future generations serves the best interest of Oklahoma travelers, the state's tourism industry and the overall economy.

Encouraging Conservation in Oklahoma (ECO) is a voluntary program created in March 2009 to encourage, develop and promote sustainable travel practices. The result of a partnership between DEQ and the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department, ECO offers the education, technical guidance, certification and marketing support that businesses and organizations need to provide economical and environmentally friendly travel options. The Oklahoma Star Incentive Program guidelines are used in the ECO program to improve environmental performance as well as the state's image.

To obtain ECO certification, facilities must comply with all applicable laws and regulations. This ensures that all participants are models of regulatory

compliance as well as environmental excellence. Participants are also required to submit baseline performance data, conduct a thorough assessment of their property, establish waste reduction goals and implement sustainable practices. These include waste reduction, reuse and recycling, water conservation and energy efficiency.

The first facilities to be certified were the Canebrake Restaurant and Spa in Wagoner and the National Center for Employee Development (NCED), a world-class training, learning, and conference facility in Norman. The Canebrake was certified at the gold level for its green building and waste reduction strategies, recycling program and community activities. NCED, a platinum level facility, has a comprehensive conservation system. A certified green meetings facility with an on-site organic herb garden, a comprehensive energy management system and a strong employee training program, NCED exemplifies the possibilities for sustainable operations with a committed management team.



DEQ's Executive Director Steve Thompson, right, presents the City of Wagoner a Ready for Reuse plaque for the Wagoner National Guard Armory during a special ceremony.

## DEQ Cleans Up Armories; Communities Benefit

**N**ational Guard armories dot Oklahoma's landscape. However, the need for these armories, located in more than 100 communities, has changed. Rather than operate smaller military guard units in many communities, the Oklahoma Military Department is consolidating functions into fewer but larger facilities. In 2006, DEQ and the Department of Central Services partnered with the Oklahoma Military Department to remove environmental hazards, such as asbestos and lead-based paint, from former armories. Once the hazards are removed, the buildings are available for beneficial reuse by the local communities.

In the last three years, more than 20 National Guard armories have been cleaned up and turned

over to local municipalities. Many of the armories have been revitalized, becoming business centers or municipal operations, like police departments. Once complete, the Mangum armory will house as many as 90 inmates for a state Department of Corrections work center. The Tishomingo armory will become a community center with a gym and large multipurpose and events center. Allen uses the armory for agriculture and vocational classes. Tonkawa and Chickasha brought in manufacturing companies that, in turn, have brought jobs to those areas.

"This program is making a positive impact on the local communities while preserving the state and community heritage," said Angela Hughes, DEQ program manager.

# Land Protection Division Initiates its Own Mercury Program

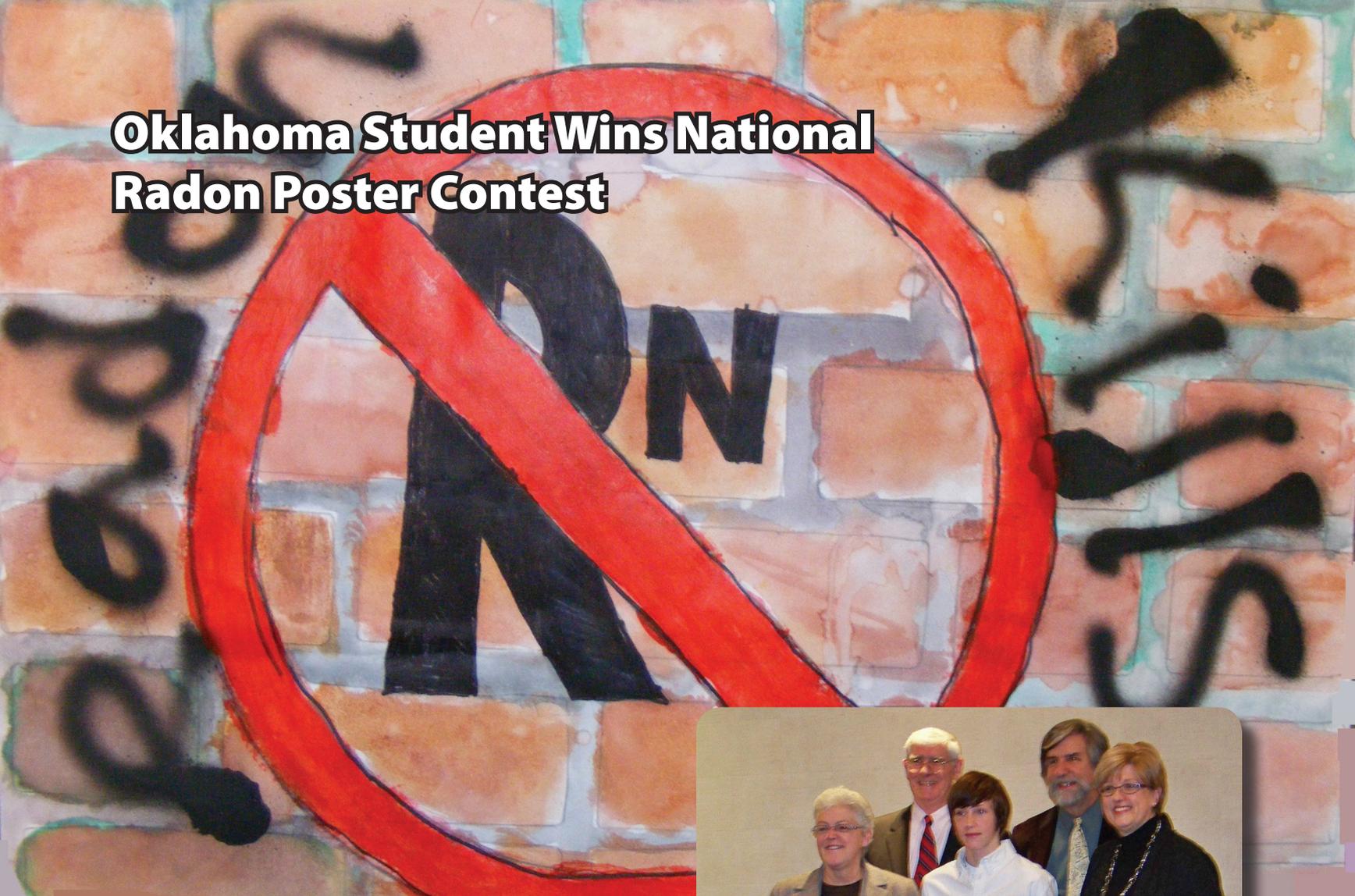


**D**EQ launched a mercury program in 2009. The purpose of the program is to remove the highly toxic metal mercury from residents' homes. Naturally found in air, land, and water, mercury can be hazardous to human health and the environment. Homes often have mercury stored in long-forgotten containers, and occasionally, children discover it, play with it and spill it. Mercury vapor is invisible to the human eye and has no detectable odor. DEQ determined that a mercury program was necessary after several mercury spills led to children being admitted to hospitals with severe mercury poisoning. The program also provides a service to Oklahoma residents in that it collects

mercury-containing items, such as thermometers, thermostats, and switches, when there is no recycler or disposal means.

Mercury has to be cleaned up with the right tools and techniques, and health risks can be aggravated by inappropriate attempts to clean it up. DEQ has the proper equipment for mercury cleanup, including a mercury vapor analyzer, which can detect mercury in the air at levels below residential screening levels. The agency has screened homes where mercury was spilled to determine whether a threat to human health exists even after a small spill cleanup. A portion of solid waste fees is used to fund the mercury program.

# Oklahoma Student Wins National Radon Poster Contest



*The award winning poster.*

**A**lec Johnson, a Guthrie Junior High School student, placed first in the 2010 National Radon Poster Contest. Johnson's poster was chosen from 2,862 entries. Johnson, along with a parent and teacher, received an all-expense paid trip to Washington, D.C. to attend the national award ceremony on Jan. 15, 2010. His artwork will be featured on promotional material for the 2011 National Radon Poster Contest and on the National Radon Program Services Web site.

The annual contest is sponsored by DEQ, Kansas State University and EPA to promote radon awareness. This is DEQ's third time to host the contest and the second time an Oklahoma state winner has placed in the contest. Participants submit original artwork relating to radon and are judged on accuracy, visual communication, reproducibility and originality.

Radon is formed by the natural radioactive decay of uranium in rock, soil and water. It becomes a health hazard if it is trapped and concentrated in homes and other buildings. EPA estimates that radon causes about 20,000 deaths from lung cancer annually in the



*Left to right: EPA Assistant Administrator for Air and Radiation Gina McCarthy, EPA Director of Indoor Air Thomas Kelly, Poster Contest Winner Alec Johnson, Bruce Sneed from Kansas State University, Paulette Moulos with the National Safety Council.*

United States. Because radon is colorless, odorless and tasteless, special detection kits are necessary to find a potential problem. Test kits can be purchased from DEQ or from home improvement stores. Radon mitigation is recommended if tests indicate indoor radon levels above four picocuries per liter of air.



*Saba Tahmassebi, LPD chief engineer, speaks at the University of Phoenix's commencement ceremony August 1, 2009.*

## **DEQ Engineer Wins Teaching Award**

**S**aba Tahmassebi, Land Protection Division chief engineer, was presented with the 2009 "Outstanding Faculty of the Year" award by the University of Phoenix, an accredited university offering on-campus and online college degree programs. Tahmassebi is the lead faculty for science and mathematics and was selected for the prestigious award from among 130 of his peers. Tahmassebi also spoke at

the commencement ceremony August 1, 2009.

Tahmassebi earned a doctorate in petroleum engineering from the University of Oklahoma and a master's in petroleum engineering from the University of Southern California. Tahmassebi's advanced degrees and professional experience allows him to bring both academic theory and real-life insight to the classroom.

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