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California State University Northridge
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My name is Brandon Montes and I am a senior in the major of Environmental and Occupational Health at California State University Northridge. First off I want to say I feel very fortunate for my opportunity to experience a summer as a JRCOSTEP. This experience has had a very positive impact on my growth as a young adult and as a future professional in the field. My internship/externship lasted from June 10th through August 16th in the greater Tucson area for Indian Health Service. I felt very fortunate to able to work with two totally different tribes, both the Pascua Yaqui and Tohono O'odham. I am also thankful for being placed in such a caring and down to earth office. My main supervisor was LCDR Angela Hodge, who was very helpful and kind. She was patient with me the whole way through, and always seemed excited to show me the ropes. The acting director of the office was CAPT Don Williams, who was another great and super knowledgeable person.

One of the first things that I did was head out with Don on one of his monthly STOP (Securing Tohono O'odham People) meetings. He leads a coalition that brings together people from the community and surrounding offices to tackle vehicle safety concerns. In this particular meeting we critiqued a PowerPoint presentation discussing backover prevention. As well as meeting with everyone, we brought car seats and booster chairs; we handed these out to the community members who work at the recreational centers. The Tohono O'odham Nation has a serious concern for vehicle safety. Many of the Nation's residents neglect the seat belt laws and simply neglect the need for child safety seats. As a result IHS constantly gets a steady flow of car seats and booster seats to be donated to the residents along with education on proper installation and use.



One of the main tasks that we carried out was a six day operation in which we vaccinated as many animals as we could across the reservation. This operation is very important to the tribes and is carried out similarly across the country. The purpose is to vaccinate as many animals as possible for rabies and give K9's a tick and flea collar. Vector control is a major part of IHS, considering the high number of dog bites and other vector born diseases. During this time two vehicles set out, each with an Army Veterinarian, Veterinarian tech, and someone from IHS. In total we vaccinated more than 1100 dogs and cats. It was clear how important this task was, considering some families had 10+ dogs and cats.

Another major aspect of IHS is the inspection of food establishments and recreational facilities. I was lucky enough to do a couple of joint inspections of two local casinos. Together with LCDR Hodge and Field Environmental Health Officer Chris Caler we inspected the casinos food and beverage stations. Some of the common violations we encountered were temperature/time abuse, storage issues, and inadequate hand washing facilities. Most of the violations were corrected on the spot and the casino managers seemed enthused to have corrective action taken. In addition to taking temperatures, we also checked the ware washing machines to insure they were functioning properly and that chemicals were within the required parameters. The casinos were very diverse and always kept me on my toes. As well as restaurants and casinos I inspected schools and recreational centers/pools. At the pools we ensured that the chemicals were also within the required parameters, that the pool equipment was in good working order, and that the proper documentation was provided.

I was also lucky enough to inspect both a high school and an elementary, and at both these facilities we looked for safety concerns. We reviewed the fire alarm systems, MSDS binders, cafeterias, and many other concerns. The schools were very nice, but unfortunately were quickly falling into disrepair due to lack of maintenance and staffing. At the elementary we found most of the emergency lighting out of order and the many restrooms backed up with raw sewage. Fortunately school had not yet started and the staff was aware of these problems and had plans to address these issues.



Probably the single best skill that I developed has been risk communication. Working with the Nation's people forced me to really think about my audience, the people required a different type of approach. The people of the Nation are not aware of some of the risks associated with what they do, so explaining to them what they are doing is unsafe is not an easy task. Unlike in L.A. County when inspecting a facility, if you find some sort of violation the people are quick with an excuse or lie. On the Nation people either don't know what they are doing is incorrect or maybe don't care, this is where a delicate approach is required. Out here you need to know how to convey your message without sounding overwhelming or confusing. You cannot expect the people to take corrective action into their own hands, you need to give them the resources and in most instances get them started. I really enjoyed this aspect of the field because this where it became challenging and one can only hope that I made a positive impact.



Overall I feel great about this experience and know that there is no better opportunity for experience offered in an internship. This internship gave me the chance to experience food safety, vector control, and general environmental health. I am thankful for the opportunities provided to me and I know that what I have learned will help carry me through my career.