

**Arilyn Lee**  
**Extern Summer 2024**  
**Eastern Kentucky University**  
**Bemidji Area office**  
**Bemidji, Minnesota**

My name is Arilyn Lee, and I am a junior at Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) studying environmental health science and sustainability with a minor in greenhouse fruit and vegetable production. This summer, I had an eye-opening opportunity to extern with the Indian Health Service (IHS) in Bemidji, MN. Before this experience, I knew very little about Native American culture or how the U.S. government supports tribal communities. Working in HIS, Division of Environmental Health Services, gave me deeper insight and understanding.



CDR Greg Calvert and Arilyn Lee

I was stationed at the Bemidji Area Office (BAO), under my preceptor, CDR Greg Calvert. Initially, I was nervous, but the experience quickly showed me that I had nothing to worry about. I had the opportunity to work across nine different tribes, including White Earth, Mille Lacs, Bois Forte, Oneida, Leech Lake, Menominee, Lac Courte Ojibwe (LCO), Red Cliff, Lake Vermillion, and Shakopee. I conducted food safety inspections at various locations, provided assessments for healthy homes, and assisted a healthcare center with chemical hazard communication. I conducted occupational safety surveys in health clinics and safety and health surveys of schools, healthcare facilities, and recreational centers. Additionally, I created and delivered presentations on topics including nitrous oxide. I had the opportunity to apply what I learned in my food safety class to events like powwows and tribal festivals, where I conducted health and safety assessments. I also earned my ServSafe Food Manager Certification, which allows me to teach the course in the future.



Beyond food safety, I explored occupational and patient safety related to radiation and nitrous oxide in medical settings – I knew subjects I had no prior knowledge of. I worked on specialized tasks, including assessing nitrous oxide levels, evaluating radiation exposure, and performing air ventilation surveys. These hands-on experiences made the knowledge stick and deepened my understanding of the field. I developed an appreciation for this branch of environmental health that I might not have explored otherwise. Learning from my preceptor, CDR Calvert, who is a wealth of knowledge, was an incredibly enjoyable experience, and I am thankful for all the knowledge I gained while working with him in this area.

One major project that I worked on with ENS Zach Shober, COSTEP/Extern, BAO, was creating a nitrous oxide safety training program, which I based on the story of "The Three Little Pigs" to keep the material engaging yet informative for dental staff. Zach and I thoroughly enjoyed creating this training for the Oneida Health Clinic. We found the process both rewarding and enjoyable, and we hope it will continue to benefit tribal dental clinics in the future.



Culturally, the experience was invaluable. I participated in powwows where I learned from tribal representatives about their traditions and stories, which gave me a deeper connection to their culture. A big highlight of my externship was traveling to remote tribal communities. Although the driving could be long, the opportunity to see such beautiful and unique places made it worthwhile.

Throughout my time at IHS, I worked with wonderful colleagues who were professional but laid-back. The atmosphere was positive, and each person brought something unique to the team. These interactions strengthened my commitment to an environmental health career, and I could see myself returning to IHS in the future. After my time at the BAO, I felt truly confident in the surveys we conducted and the work I had learned over the two months I was there. I would recommend this internship opportunity to any of my peers because I would love nothing more than for them to have the eye-opening experience that I had.

I'd like to acknowledge the support from BAO staff, especially CDR Greg Calvert, CAPT Tim Duffy, LT Joe Sarisky, LTJG Brady Stidham, and CDR Tim Taylor. I'm grateful to my fellow externs, Reese Stonebraker and Zach Shober, who made this experience even more memorable.