

Emma Huntley
JRCOSTEP Summer 2024
Sante Fe Service Unit
Eastern Kentucky University
Sante Fe, New Mexico



My name is Emma Huntley and I am currently a student at Eastern Kentucky University. I am going into my senior year in August 2024, with plans to graduate in May 2025 with a Bachelor's of Science in Environmental Health Science. I am required to have a minimum of 160 hours of professional experience to graduate. I heard about this externship through a distribution email my school advisor sent. After reading what the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) was about and talking with a previous graduate of Eastern Kentucky University, LCDR Stephanie Coffee, National Park Service, I was eager to start the application process.

A few months after applying, I had a few phone calls and was informed I was assigned to the Indian Health Service, Albuquerque Area, Division of Environmental Health Services. A few months later I began the drive from Winchester, KY to Albuquerque, NM. The Service Unit services around 27 different tribes in the region and during my time here I was able to serve 11 of those tribes.

During my time in New Mexico, I was able to deepen my education and broadened my knowledge by partaking in various field work opportunities such as facilitating rabies clinics, entering data into the Web-based Environmental Health reporting System (WebEHRs), and assist with car seat clinics. A large part of my summer assignment was learning about food safety. I traveled to different tribal organizations, mostly feast days, casinos, and detention centers, conducting routine food inspections. I became familiar with the FDA Food Code and earned my ServSafe Food Protection Manager certification. In addition to this, I had the opportunity to participate in institutional environmental health surveys. I went along with LCDR Kathryn McNamara and retired PHS officer CAPT Keith Cook to conduct hospital, dental clinics, and infection control surveys. These institutional surveys allowed me to become familiar with the National Fire Protection Association codes, something I had no previous knowledge about.



My primary project for the summer was writing a standard operating procedure (SOP) for the new drinking water testing equipment at the ASU office. The goal of this project was to develop an Area-wide resource available for Albuquerque Area DEHS staff to use as a reference when conducting quality assurance checks in tribal communities after possible drinking water contamination. The two testing kits I became familiar with were the IDEXX Colilert testing kit

for *E. Coli* and the Millipore HPC total count sampler. The presence of *E. coli* in drinking water is more serious than coliform bacteria alone because it indicates that human or animal waste has contaminated the water supply which poses a serious public health risk. The HPC is used to assess the conditions that affect microbial growth in a water source. Some steps I took to reach this goal included gathering and organizing all the materials relating to water testing, performing quality control assessments, and researching the kits to finalize my selection. A large part of this project was learning how to word, organize, and format a SOP since I have never written one before. This will be a useful skill that I will use in the future.

One of my favorite parts of this internship was the travel. Before coming to NM, I had not been this far out west so I was eager to explore. I was able to travel to Los Alamos, Bandelier National Monument, El Morro National Monument, Mesa Verde, and the Petroglyphs. I also love to hike so I was able to explore the Sadia Mountain trails as well as local running and biking routes.

I am grateful for my time with IHS. I am so thankful for all the wonderful experiences I had this summer and I am excited to see where my career in Environmental Health will take me. I will forever be appreciative of this opportunity and would recommend anyone who is interested in public health or environmental health to pursue an internship like this one.



Bandelier National Monument



Mesa Verde National Park