

Yazmeane Pena
Extern Summer 2024
Texas Tech University
Western Arizona District Office
Tempe, Arizona

My name is Yazmeane Pena and I graduated from Texas Tech University with a B.S. in Biology and Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center with a MPH. I found this externship opportunity through USAJOBS after searching for opportunities to delve into environmental field work that would make a difference. Fortunately, I was selected and couldn't have asked for a better experience! My duty station was in the Western Arizona District Office and my preceptor was Vincent Garcia, District Environmental Health Officer. The eight tribes I served were: Ak-Chin Indian Community, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, Tonto Apache Tribe, Yavapai-Apache Nation, Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe, Quechan Tribe, and Cocopah Indian Tribe. The scope of my work included me shadowing and assisting with 24 inspections, creating helpful documentation for those inspections, using the Web-based Environmental Health Reporting System (WebEHRS) to document my work, receiving basic food safety training, and providing bloodborne pathogen training. The inspections I assisted with encompassed six aquatic facilities, three fitness centers, six restaurants/bars, three salons/spas, three hotels, a jail, recreational center, and preschool.

My special projects encompassed aquatics, hotels, food, and rabies. *For aquatic facilities*, I created three items. The first item is a survey checklist for making the process of asking preliminary questions, recording water chemistry, and making calculations easier. The second item is an aquatic facility closure items informational that lists what non-compliant items would result in a pool and/or spa closure, as well as easy to read tables of water chemistry ranges. This would be ideal to provide Certified Pool Operators (CPOs). The third item is a *Plumbing Anatomy 101* PowerPoint to help new staff better understand pool and spa plumbing systems, which can be overwhelming for the first inspections. *For hotel facilities*, I created a survey checklist to help improve inspection flow. I found myself jumping from one item to the next in an inefficient manner, so the checklist allowed me to focus on groups of items in the same category before moving to the next group of items. *For food facilities*, I created a survey checklist to serve as a quick reminder of appropriate temperatures for various food items and different bodies of water, as well as for sanitizer levels and assisting with the recording of temperatures. On a personal note, conducting food surveys was very overwhelming with the high level of multitasking required for watching the employees in action in addition to taking various temperatures and carrying on with normal facility-type inspection. For my last project, *rabies prevention and control*, I updated the rabies vaccination certificate database, which serves to help improve response time for animal bite investigations and up-to-date rabies certificate verification. For instance, during my externship, there was a Canadian woman in the U.S. needing verification of her dog's rabies vaccine for her to be able to cross the Canadian border with her dog. Fortunately, the dog's rabies vaccination certificate information was in our database and thus easy to retrieve. The woman was able to bring her dog back with her to Canada.

Memorable activities included helping Mr. Garcia provide bloodborne pathogen training to around 400 casino employees over the span of two days in Yuma, AZ. Another memorable activity was attending the Annual Arizona Infectious Disease (AZID) conference hosted in Tempe, AZ and the IHS Injury and Violence Prevention (Course 1) training in Scottsdale, AZ. I got to hear many amazing presentations and network with various professionals!

Based on my experience, I would recommend inspectors are properly prepared before every inspection, even if it is at a familiar facility type. This would include receiving proper and thorough training, reading previous inspection reports and corrective action plans, making sure one has all the necessary items and that they are functioning, making note of items/areas you need to inspect, and finally, brushing-up on areas that need refreshing.

Overall, this externship has been an enriching, thrilling, and enlightening experience. I was able to travel and conduct work with eight different tribes, which immersed me into cultures I had no prior experience with. I learned and developed a versatile skillset needed for inspecting a variety of facilities. I also had the unique experience of helping provide training to my largest audience to date! Lastly, I had the pleasure of getting to know the native and public health professional community through routine inspections and attending a conference and training course. I could not have asked for a better externship experience.

