



**Environmental Complaints and  
Local Services**

# Teamwork is Key to ECLS Success

The Environmental Complaints and Local Services (ECLS) Division is charged with representing DEQ and conducting agency activities locally, from community-based offices. Seventy environmental specialists across the state serve the department's six regions: West, Southeast, Central, Northeast, South Central and North Central. The specialists coordinate with 12 support personnel, based in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, to respond rapidly to environmental complaints and to provide friendly, efficient service to citizens and the regulated community.

The key to making distribution of staff in the field work efficiently is *teamwork* – cooperation between those working in the field and those supporting field work from the Complaints and Program Management Section. This section is organized by role into three units: Complaints, On-Site and Facilities. The Complaints Unit works hand-in-hand with environmental specialists, wherever they are based, to support prompt investigation and resolution of environmental com-



*Sunflowers swaying in unison in the Oklahoma breeze.*

plaints. The On-Site Unit facilitates specialists' interactions with certified installers, septage pumpers and anyone else concerned with installing and maintaining on-site sewage treatment systems. Environmental specialists partner with the Facilities Unit as they inspect regulated facilities. The unit tracks the inspections and refers critical

violations to the appropriate division for further investigation.

Being available and involved in the state's communities is central to maintaining service quality. In an era of public skepticism toward government agencies, ECLS staff are convinced that a local presence, honesty and mutual trust will help DEQ build cooperative rela-

tionships with local government, the regulated community and the public. It's worth the effort: Through teamwork, ECLS, local governments and regulated entities have often arrived at far more creative and effective solutions to Oklahoma's persistent environmental problems than they could have as potential adversaries. ■

# Boral Brick Success

DEQ strives not only for environmental compliance, but also for opportunities to return damaged or unproductive land to usefulness. An abandoned brick factory in Union City presented just such an opportunity, allowing two DEQ divisions to do what they do best. The reopening and expansion of the Boral Brick facility in Union City is an exciting success story for both the Customer Services Division (CSD) and the Environmental Complaints & Local Services Division (ECLS).

In January 2004, ECLS received a number of complaints about an abandoned brick-manufacturing site in rural Canadian County. After closing in 1990, the site had become a magnet for illegal dumping. After inspecting the entire area, ECLS Environmental Specialist Bruce Vande Lune concluded that several of the complaints were valid. Boral Brick, the owner of the site, cooperated with the department by initiating remediation and entering into an agreement with DEQ that provided both parties with a timetable for addressing environmental programs and secured the property against further illegal dumping. Further, the bricks from the old kilns are being recycled;

they have been given to a Chicago man who will use them to build a house.

The story doesn't end with the cleanup of the site. For years, Boral Brick has been thinking about reopening the site. Kyle Arthur of the CSD's Customer Assistance Program (CAP) was asked to provide permitting assistance. CAP has assisted many prospective clients over the years, forging an excellent national reputation as a member of the Department of Commerce's One-Stop-Team. As a member of this team, CAP assists new and expanding industry with environmental regulatory information and serves as a liaison between the company and DEQ to coordinate permitting efforts.

CAP assisted Boral in obtaining its air permit and coordinating the issues relating to removal of debris from the site. Thanks to this assistance, Boral Brick, Inc. is now planning to construct a \$35 million state-of-the-art facility that will employ 50 people. This will provide an exciting economic opportunity for the rural community of Union City, just west of Oklahoma City. Responding to an issue raised by ECLS, the company plans to use storm water retention ponds to collect rainwa-



*Boral Brick site before cleanup.*



*Construction begins on new Boral Brick plant.*

ter and to use that water in their brick-making process. This will greatly reduce the manufacturer's demand on potable drinking water from Union City.

The Boral Brick success story illustrates how two of DEQ's divisions are

working together to fulfill the mission of the department. CSD's Customer Assistance Program and ECLS both continue to assist the citizens and businesses of Oklahoma in achieving a clean, prosperous and attractive Oklahoma. ■



# Kids Send in Posters by the Thousands

February is the occasion of the annual *Keep Our Land Grand* Trash Poster Contest, the time of year when thousands of posters from Oklahoma's young artists flood local DEQ offices. Each participant is vying for the chance to be the county winner and ultimately the state winner in his or her age category. County winners are awarded a certificate, recognition at a school assembly, and the chance to compete state-wide. State-level prizes include a cash award, recognition at an awards banquet and publication of the poster in the upcoming issue of the *Keep Our Land Grand* calendar.

Last year, DEQ staff had the pleasure of judging 12,809 posters from across Oklahoma. The event is a cooperative effort of DEQ, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, the Cherokee Nation and the Keep Oklahoma Beautiful organization. The competition was established 15 years ago to raise youth awareness of the effects of littering on the environment. ■



*Richard Dumas, 6th grade, Millwood Elementary local winner, Oklahoma County, with Courtney Barrett, Oklahoma County Environmental Specialist.*



*Karen Hrbacek, Oklahoma County Environmental Specialist, displays one of the thousands of entries received for the 2005 Trash Poster Contest. Hrbacek coordinates the judging of state-level entries each year.*

# DEQ Listens to Certified Installers, Improves Access to Training

Certification training for installers of on-site sewage treatment systems is now far more accessible for its primary customers, thanks to a joint working group of certified installers and staff from the Environmental Complaints and Local Services (ECLS) Division. The working group met first in April 2004, after ECLS invited installers to join staff in a decision-making process that would affect certification training and other issues of interest. Among other things, the collaboration produced a new Super Certification class with improved scheduling.

In the past, three courses required for installers to become certified were scheduled independently, on different dates and at varying locations. The new Super Certification class presents the courses in sequence, all on one day. The new arrangement makes it possible for installers to complete the training with just a single day spent away from work and family. Thirty trainees who attended the first session in August 2004 de-



*Local Environmental Specialist Eric Braly provides instruction to certified installers during a Super Certification Class.*

clared the class a significant improvement.

In forming the cooperative working group, ECLS implemented

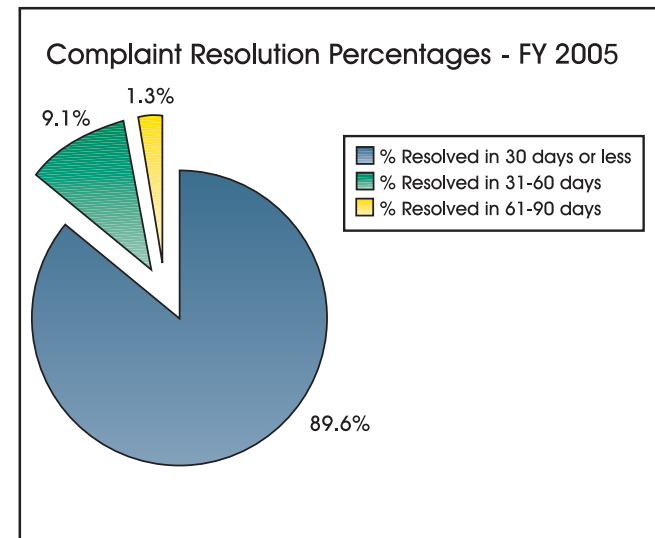
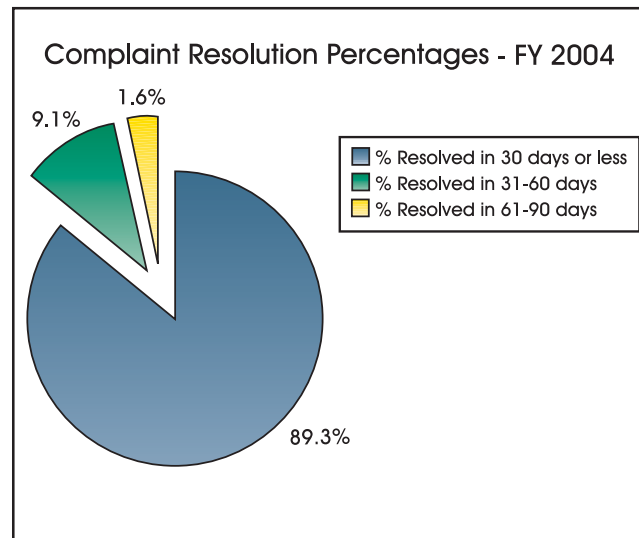
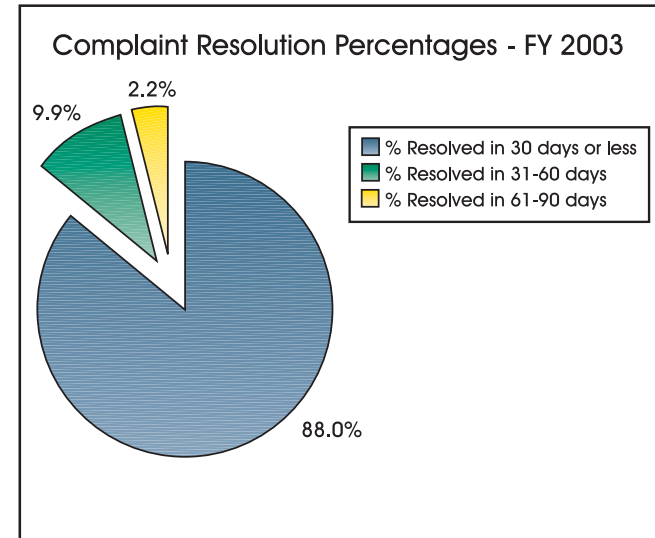
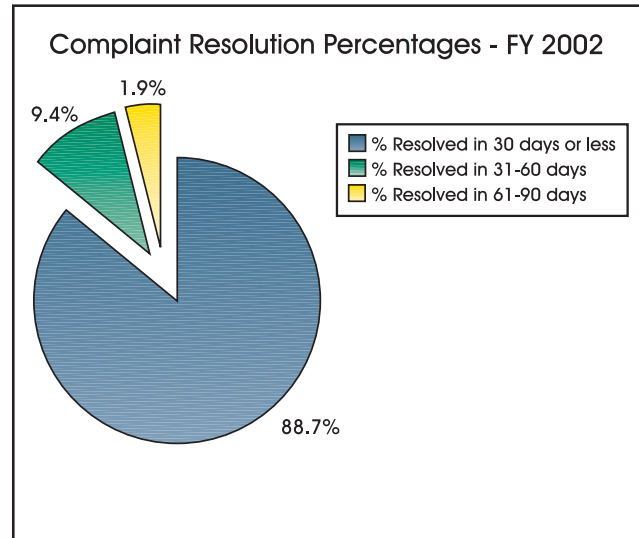
a process for citizens to collaborate with government administrators to shape services that citizens ultimately receive. Direct and

meaningful public participation is just one example of ECLS's community-based approach to its day-to-day operations. ■

# Most Complaints Quickly Resolved

Sure, DEQ has been bragging for the last 10 years about its nearly spotless record for resolving complaints within 90 days. But what does that actually mean to complainants? Are the majority of problems being corrected around Day 89?

In fact, few complaints get anywhere near that old. When the 90-day mark is approached before resolution, the likely culprit is a recalcitrant responsible party (RP), and not many RPs fit into that category. The vast majority of people, 90 percent, comply and settle complaints within 30 days after receiving a warning letter. Fewer than 2 percent hold out until receiving a Notice of Violation (NOV); for them resolution may take as many as 60 days. Once in a while, ECLS must exercise all available enforcement options. These instances, infrequent though they are, account for DEQ setting the 90-day maximum resolution goal. Consistently out-performing that goal and pursuing meaningful complaint outcomes are our ways of demonstrating DEQ's commitment to achieving compliance with environmental regulations. ■





# Cooperating for Success: OWRB Infrastructure Assessment

*Infrastructure needs, such as a water tower, are surveyed for OWRB.*



Construction and maintenance of water and sewer systems are prohibitively expensive projects for many Oklahoma communities, especially in rural areas. To help overcome funding barriers, the Oklahoma Water Resources Board (OWRB) makes low-cost loans and awards grants to local

governments for constructing or improving public water supplies and wastewater treatment systems.

While recently evaluating its grant program's effectiveness, the board wanted to know the current condition of the facilities that it had funded in the past. It also

wanted help with identifying and assessing potential future grant projects. The board turned to DEQ's Environmental Complaints and Local Services (ECLS) Division for assistance. Relying on ECLS inspectors' familiarity with area facilities and coupling infrastructure assessment with their routine compli-

ance inspections, ECLS could deliver the project far more efficiently than an outside researcher. Using a jointly developed inspection protocol, ECLS inspectors examined grant-funded projects at more than 300 Oklahoma facilities, assessing their current condition, recommending improvements and reporting potential future projects at the sites.

The collaborative project certainly achieved its goal of providing OWRB with the solid data needed to evaluate and plan ahead for its programs. But the project's truer measure of success may lie in the innovative partnership established by the two agencies. DEQ and OWRB demonstrated that in cooperating, organizations can often accomplish more, faster and with greater success, than can be accomplished when they act alone. Together, the two agencies created a model interagency collaboration that leads to safer drinking water and cleaner streams and rivers, a cost-effective outcome benefiting all Oklahomans. ■

# ECLS and WQD Partner for Wastewater Treatment Regulatory Oversight

Where traditional sewage collection systems and treatment facilities are impractical, well-managed total-retention lagoons and land application systems do their job. The Water Quality Division (WQD) has had regulatory oversight of these alternative systems for several years. Their increasing numbers, however, has affected the division's ability to keep up with permitting and enforcement, especially in the state's more remote regions.

To maintain quality service, WQD and ECLS entered into an intra-agency partnership, combining WQD's engineering expertise with the local knowledge and situational experience of ECLS environmental specialists. This innovative partnership takes advantage of the fact that the environmental specialists are based in field offices, already serving the regions most needing attention. As an added benefit, ECLS staff have a head start learning their new responsibilities, having already handled the technical and enforcement as-



*A total-retention lagoon that is not well maintained.*

pects of residential on-site lagoons. ECLS simplified compliance by consolidating all rules governing total-retention and land application systems into one chapter. ECLS staff now provide regulatory services and technical assistance for 500 wastewater treatment systems. ■



*A series of well-maintained total-retention lagoons.*



# Communities and ECLS Protect Future Ground Water Supplies

Ground water wells have been delivering clean, cool and seemingly inexhaustible supplies of drinking water to Oklahomans for many decades. Recently those of us depending on the resource have become more attentive to protecting ground water quality not only for ourselves, but for future generations. About 48 percent of the state's public water supply systems rely directly on ground water. Population in those areas is growing.

Typically, efforts to ensure adequate supplies of potable water protect the structural portions of those water supplies – the collection, treatment and distribution systems. Wellhead Protection Plans (WHPPs) add special protections for ground water systems and support public education about the characteristics and protection of ground water. The plans identify and manage recharge areas for specific wells or well fields. In the event of ground water or well contamination, WHPPs establish the appropriate local emergency response.



*Improper handling of wastes are one of the issues wellhead protection plans address.*

ECLS environmental specialists and the officials of nearly 200 Oklahoma communities have been working side-by-side for the last year, assessing potential sources of contamination in well field recharge areas and reviewing water supply system protection plans. In addition, the environmental specialists were asked to help another 35 water systems to draft

protection plans. ECLS has given expert advice and guidance wherever needed. From teaching simple housekeeping procedures to consulting on comprehensive land use planning, environmental specialists are pleased to work with community officials, assuring that the plans that protect their ground water quality will also reflect their local priorities. ■



*Review of local communities' wellhead protection plans helps assess potential sources of contamination.*

# A Helping Hand for a Good Cause

When sewage began seeping up through the soccer field at Camp Oki-Wa-Nee five miles west of Sapulpa, caretaker Mike Thompson recognized it as a potential health risk to young campers and their leaders. Thompson contacted the DEQ Environmental Complaints and Local Services (ECLS) Division, and environmental specialists traveled to the site to investigate. Shallow ground water proved to be the culprit – a problem common to the area, but prohibitively expensive to correct. Because shallow ground water prevents conventional septic systems from operating correctly, Oki-Wa-Nee needed an advanced wastewater treatment system. Without it, the nonprofit organization Camp Fire USA might have to close the youth camp.

ECLS personnel often find themselves at the crossroads of environmental and social problems in the course of their day-to-day work. If at all possible, especially when nonprofit and charitable organizations are involved, ECLS tries to protect public safety



with affordable solutions to problems. Sometimes those solutions call upon agency personnel and members of the regulated community to step outside their conventional roles and act together for the greater good. When Camp Oki-Wa-Nee's future appeared in jeopardy, ECLS staff contacted Bill Warden, Executive Director of the Oklahoma Certified Installers' Association (OCIA).

OCIA members had previ-

ously expressed interest in helping individuals and organizations with on-site sewage problems. Warden agreed that the camp was a worthy candidate. He agreed to coordinate the project, combining ECLS advisory and technical expertise with OCIA resources and generosity. Two OCIA members, Carl McKittrick and Curtis Huffman, signed on to assist. ECLS provided a construction authorization through a fee waiver.

*Those involved in getting a system installed for the Camp Fire Girls are Bill Warden, OCIA Executive Director, Cindy and Curtis Huffman, Huffman's Excavating, Carl McKittrick, Jr., McKittrick Precast, Michele Lamkin, DEQ Environmental Specialist, and Mike Thompson, Campfire USA.*

McKittrick generously donated an aerobic treatment unit and Huffman, a DEQ-certified installer, completed the installation at no cost.

Thanks to their collective vision, heart and willingness to cooperate, OCIA and ECLS were able to equip Camp Oki-Wa-Nee with a state-approved aerobic treatment system. The soccer field is open again and safe for active, young campers. ■