

# OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ANNUAL REPORT



## ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLAINTS AND LOCAL SERVICES DIVISION

# ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLAINTS AND LOCAL SERVICES EXPECT NOTHING BUT THE BEST

The Environmental Complaints and Local Services Division (ECLS) brings the environmental programs of the DEQ to the local level. Locally based environmental specialists have some role in nearly all of the programs

administered by the DEQ. They provide regulatory inspections as well as technical assistance for all facilities having a DEQ permit. They also handle all aspects of the on-site sewage program. This includes conducting soil tests, designing

septic systems, inspecting sewage system installations and providing regulatory oversight of the certified installers. Most importantly, the local environmental specialists respond to all citizen complaints regardless of the program area.

## LESS SEPTIC SYSTEM FAILURE EXPECTED

ECLS has implemented the use of soil profile descriptions to design on-site sewage disposal systems. Soil profile descriptions involve texturing and classifying the soil to determine the relative concentrations of sand, silt and clay. Now system designers will have the option of using either percolation tests or soil profiles to design and size on-site sewage disposal systems. DEQ believes that the soil profile description has many advantages over the percolation test. First, it is faster since there is no need for the four-hour presoak required for percolation tests. Second, the soil profile description can be done in any weather without affecting the results while percolation test results may be skewed by either extremely wet or extremely dry conditions. Third and most importantly, the soil profile utilizes a field analysis of the clay content at each depth, enabling a designer to accurately size a system and set a depth for installation that assures that the subsurface absorption lines are installed in suitable soil.

So far, only DEQ environmental specialists have received training on soil profile descriptions from Dr. Brian Carter with the Oklahoma State University Extension Service. The next step for ECLS is to work with Dr. Carter to develop a program to train and certify private consultants and system designers who wish to use soil profile descriptions.

WITH USE OF

## NEW SOIL TEST



Don Pendergraph with the soil testing instructor.

## RECENT TRANSFER OF STORM WATER PROGRAM TO ECLS

# RESULTS IN BETTER

# USE OF RESOURCES

**E**CLS' role in the Storm Water program has expanded. Its past involvement in the program was limited to investigating complaints concerning improper sediment controls at and discharges from construction sites. This year, ECLS began processing permit applications for storm water discharges associated with construction activities disturbing more than five acres.

ECLS also began conducting inspections of construction sites that have terminated their storm water permits.

New federal requirements in 2002 will dictate that construction activities for sites disturbing less than five acres will be required to receive a permit. This change will more than double the number of

permits currently being issued and will affect the role local staff members currently have in the program. It is anticipated that in addition to conducting termination inspections and complaint investigations, the local staff will also be providing storm water training to local contractors and will begin identifying construction sites in non-compliance with the rules.



## ENVIRONMENT CLEANER DUE TO COMPLAINTS WORK

**T**hrough its complaint investigation and resolution, ECLS has brought about noticeable and positive environmental impact. Particularly noticeable are ECLS' accomplishments in the areas of illegally dumped solid waste and surfacing sewage.

Last year, through ECLS action, 26,866 cubic yards of solid waste were removed from illegal dumpsites and either recycled or disposed in permitted landfills. The largest single site was located in Craig County and investigated by the environmental staff in the Northeast Region. At that site, 13,333 cubic yards of solid waste were removed from the dumpsite and taken to a permitted landfill and recycling center.

ECLS also achieved significant environmental gains by requiring correction of failing septic systems. During last year, ECLS' compliance

efforts brought about the elimination of pollution caused by over ten million gallons of surfacing sewage.

## ECLS PROVIDES A HELPING HAND TO THOSE IN NEED

In the process of working complaints, ECLS discovered that a few property owners were not financially able to make corrections to their on-site systems. Through a grant program developed by ECLS and funded with money collected from penalties, ECLS assisted 46 property owners with installing approved on-site systems for their residences. In FY 2001, the average cost per system was \$1,978, with the total grant expenditure being \$91,000.

# ECLS INSPECTIONS BRING ABOUT COMPLIANCE

One of the goals of DEQ is to promote environmental protection through consistent regulation. ECLS supports this effort by administering an inspection program for facilities with a DEQ permit. The inspections serve to document compliance, identify violations and request compliance when violations are found. In most cases, facilities correct violations when notified by ECLS, but some fail to comply and require referral to the permitting division within DEQ. Through this process, ECLS is able to identify the facilities with the most serious compliance problems. DEQ is then able to focus its engineering and legal resources on these facilities.

The process begins with initial facility inspections where both critical and non-critical violations are documented. Inspections that identify critical violations are followed by a second inspection in two weeks to determine if compliance has been achieved. Local environmental specialists work with each facility to achieve compliance. If compliance on all critical violations is not achieved by the second inspection, referral is made to the appropriate division in DEQ for further action that may include enforcement. Local environmental specialists continue to work with facilities in order to achieve compliance on non-critical violations identified during inspections.

ECLS' environmental specialists performed a total of 5,209 in-

spections in FY 2001. Of those, 222 were follow-up inspections to determine if the facilities had corrected critical violations noted on the initial inspection. ECLS efforts alone brought 119 of those 222 facilities into compliance. Those 119 facili-

ties included 114 Water Quality facilities and five Land Protection facilities. ECLS referred 99 facilities to Water Quality Division and four facilities to the Land Protection Division for more intensive compliance efforts.



**Vicki Smith inspecting a well house.**

# LOCAL COMMUNITIES BENEFIT FROM ECLS'S EXPERTISE

The spirit of community involvement continues at local DEQ offices. Local DEQ employees participate each year in the community where they live and work through activities ranging from long-term commitment to one-time community projects. The involvement with the community has bridged the gap between the Agency and the community and improves both DEQ's public image and community relations. DEQ has benefited directly from local environmental specialists' involvement because their participation has helped develop skills and broaden experiences, particularly in leadership, teamwork, and decision-making. ECLS is proud of its role and commitment as leaders in community involvement where it has devoted untold amount of hours.

## SOUTHEAST REGION

### Southeast Region Provides Cleanup Assistance Following Christmas Day Ice Storm

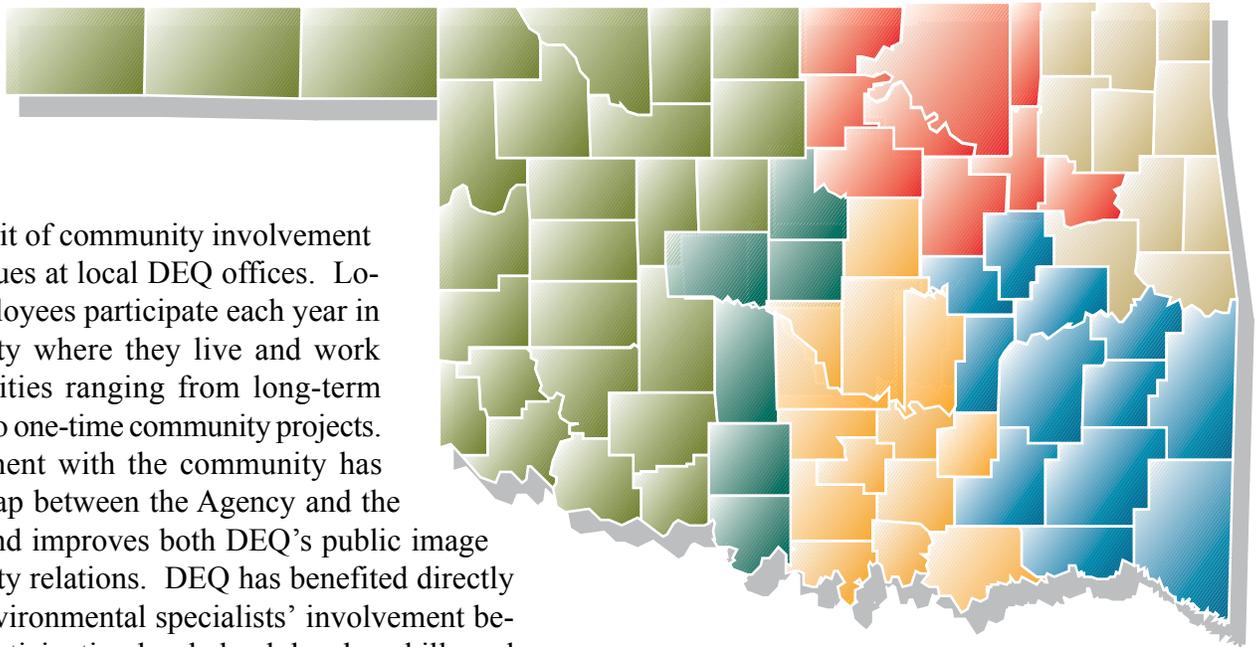
Most people will remember Christmas Day of 2000 as just another Christmas, but the residents of Southeast Oklahoma will remember it as the worst ice storm that they have ever witnessed. Freezing rain started falling late that afternoon and continued through the night and most of the next day. At first tree limbs started breaking. Then, whole trees started falling. When it was finally over, roads had been blocked, many roofs had caved in and several power lines had been downed. Southeast Oklahoma was paralyzed.

Most of the local DEQ staff had to deal first with the personal hardships created by this disaster. Most were without electricity, water and phone service. Some were without electricity for as long as two weeks. Other residents did not have electric service restored for a month or more. When the ice finally melted, there was

a monumental task of trying to figure out how to cut, haul and dispose of the huge amount of debris, most of which was trees.

As towns and cities began to cut and remove the debris, the phones started ringing at the local DEQ offices with city officials calling to ask how they could dispose of the massive amounts of brush. DEQ and FEMA formulated a plan to deal with this problem. Mostly due to the work that was done after the May 1999 Tornado, ECLS had already developed emergency plans, guidelines and forms, which had been adopted by FEMA for use nation wide. With minor modifications, these forms were used to approve staging and disposal sites throughout Southeast Oklahoma. There were more than of 145 sites approved by the local environmental specialists in the Southeast Region. By documenting these sites, the local DEQ personnel played a key role in municipal and county governments being reimbursed by FEMA for the cost of the cleanup.

There was one beneficial thing that resulted from the ice storm. The DEQ financed 20 percent of the cost of chippers for 26 cities, towns, counties and other entities.



All of the cleanup took a monumental effort on the part of all involved. Everyone willingly took time out of their schedules and worked long hours to insure this was done. It was a commendable team effort.

The following are examples of activities and projects ECLS staff participate in with communities.

## NORTHEAST REGION

Local Environmental Specialists in the Northeast Region:

- Worked with the Solid Waste Institute of Northeastern Oklahoma to further the “Trash Cop” program, clean up local dumps, and organize a household hazardous waste collection event for Tahlequah.

- Helped with the development of the Rogers County Regional Sewer Project. This project tied together many small sewage systems along the Highway 66 corridor through Rogers County.
- Created the WORRD (Waste Observant: Reuse and Recycle Daily) Program that has been used successfully for three years in the Miami Public Schools. This program was developed by Sharon Robbins who works in the Miami office. Classroom education is provided on waste reuse and recycling. Students then take the information into the community and get signatures from adults who pledge to recycle.

- Wrote for the Tar Creek Chatter, a newsletter that provides information about Superfund activities.
- Aided students from the University of Oklahoma in wetlands research at the Tar Creek Superfund Site.
- Were certified as Lead Abatement Supervisors for lead base paint removal projects inside individual homes.
- Worked on special sampling projects involving Cave Springs Branch and the Twin Cave watershed.

## SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

Local Environmental Specialists in the South Central Region:

- Provided technical assistance to the Central Oklahoma Master Conservancy District, an organization dedicated to the preservation of Lake Thunderbird and its tributaries.
- Manned booths to promote environmental education, explain DEQ’s role in protecting the environment, and recruit new professionals at:
  - East Central University’s Job Fair
  - Natural Resource Day
  - 2001 Earth First Expo
- Addressed students in East Central University’s Environmental Program regarding career opportunities at DEQ
- Served on:
  - County Solid Waste Committees:



Robert Jemison and a citizen greet each other at the Noble County Office.

- Planning and Zoning Committees
- Solid Waste Trust Authority
- Board for the Milo Project
- Worked with local trash cops to inventory illegal dumpsites

## WESTERN REGION

Environmental Specialists in the Western Region:

- Worked with Public Water Supplies in Waynoka, Cleo Springs, Granite and Lone Wolf, which have problems with high nitrates in their drinking water, locate new sources of water, upgrade treatment processes and obtain grants to fund the needed upgrades.
- Helped Fairview, Medicine Park, Mt. Park, Shattuck and Yarbrough School District obtain funding to repair or replace their sewer systems that were damaged by heavy rains last spring.

## CENTRAL REGION

The local Environmental Specialists in the Central Region:

- Helped organize the semi-annual Household Hazardous Waste Cleanup Days in Oklahoma City.
- Worked with Meridian to smoke test the wastewater system collection lines that led to the discovery of locations where surface and ground water were infiltrating the wastewater collection system.
- Identified emergency solid waste disposal sites for

communities with damage from tornados, floods and ice storms.

## NORTH CENTRAL REGION

The local Environmental Specialists in the North Central Region:

- Helped the Broken Arrow identify the solution to controlling the odors from its wastewater treatment facility that were causing multiple citizen complaints.
- Worked with the Prue to improve its low water pressure, storage and chlorine residual problems until new wells can be drilled and put into service.
- Worked with the Coweta to save it money by recycling its backwash sludge as bedding material for their water lines. By recycling this sludge, Coweta saved the cost of bedding materials, sludge disposal, and landfill fees.
- Helped the Coweta obtain a grant to fix its clear well and to replace its filter media.
- Worked with the Ramona to obtain grant money to construct a chlorine booster station and to make general improvements to its water distribution system.

