

**From the Desk of the
Environmental Health Manager
April and May 2018**



This will be my last “From the Desk of” as I will be retiring on Friday, June 29th. I want to use this forum to talk about the past 19 ¼ years working Public Environmental Health in Mason County and to honor the field staff who have made all of the good things happen. It’s been quite a ride! There have been some very good times and some very lean times. What gets us through all those times is the staff doing the day to day work of the county. The staff are often overlooked and sometimes treated poorly by the people they are working to protect. But they come to work every day and do their job to the best of their ability.

I wish people could see what I see every day when I come to work: Compassionate, hard-working people committed to protecting public health and helping others. I've never worked with a finer, more dedicated group of professionals. I want each of them to know how much I respect the specialized work they do. I am proud of the progress we have made and the things we have accomplished. The section is in transition as I leave, having lost 2 of our 7 EHS in late April and mid-May.

When I came to work here on March 1, 1999, the only thing I knew about shellfish was how tasty they were with butter, tartar sauce or cocktail sauce! Really, I am a girl from western Montana. The only oysters around were Rocky Mountain and we don’t want to go there.☺ My learning curve for marine water quality was a vertical line. Most of the people I worked with were very kind and shared their knowledge with me. I learned so much so fast and helped to bring Mason County to the forefront when it comes to doing a lot of meaningful work with not many resources. I worked hard to bring grants to Mason County to do the work that needed to be done.

In 2003 we received an award of excellence from the Washington State Public Health Association for Significant Contribution to Public health. It was for “diligent work in finding and correcting various sources of pollution in watersheds that drain to commercial and public recreational shellfish growing areas”.

In 2012 we received a “Model Practice Award” from NACCHO for our innovative “Oakland Bay Clean Water District” Model (water quality). Our poster was on display at the national conference in Los Angeles. That same year we received an award from the Puget Sound Partnership for the education and outreach work that was done by Mason County Environmental Public Health and our partners.

I got to be not only the face of Mason County Environmental Public Health but the voice as well. I lost track of the number of times I was invited to speak on the radio at KMAS. I used the opportunity to get the word out if we were working on a project or wanted people to protect themselves from West Nile Virus, to know why we shouldn't use additives in our septic tanks, or to give instructions on how to bring in a bat for testing to name a few. The local media served us well over the years.

I was very active with the Washington State Environmental Health Directors group and was the state- wide chair 2004-2005. For many years I was the chair of the zoonotic disease committee and sat on the legislative committee, often testifying before a House or Senate committee about onsite sewage and water quality issues. Most of my contemporaries have retired but we have a new, young group of directors around the state that will carry all our lessons into the future. I will miss my group of peers, they understand what I do and what that means.

Most of all I will miss the people I work with. From the staff throughout the county to the members of my department, they are a great group of people. I will miss the employees of the Environmental Health section. Each one of them are members of small group of highly trained, technical specialists doing what nobody else can. They are young and have limitless potential. Remember just how special they are. They are my legacy to Mason County.

Although everyone on staff is cross trained to work in other programs, each of them has taken their assigned program and made it their own. **Alex** stepped up and filled the appointment of lead worker with enthusiasm and professionalism. As our DOL designer's license holder he is training new staff to work in the onsite sewage program. He has taken on the Group B drinking water program (partial delegation) and is updating our policies and procedures. He puts his graphic arts talents to use on our publications. He is a great role model for the newer staff.

Katie has focused her water quality work on Hood Canal after finishing up the huge Oakland Bay project. She stepped up and accepted the vector program, working with the CD nurse and Dr. Yu on animal bites and all the investigation that goes with it. Katie is a talented facilitator and has led many of our public meetings.

Staci had taken on the Hammersley Inlet grant work, looking for the source of the Noro Virus outbreaks closing shellfish harvest during the winter as well as a little maintenance work in Oakland Bay. She left us at the end of April to work for Kitsap County Health District because her husband took a teaching job at Central Kitsap and they will be moving to Kitsap. **Sean** will be finishing the Hammersley Inlet work. He is learning onsite, handling the phone calls that come with our periodic mailings and following up on many of the onsite sewage complaints. He has taken on the Shellfish Biotoxin collection and BEACH programs. **Wendy** is immersing herself in the onsite sewage program, performing field work, permit review and approving building permits. She is working toward DOL designer licensing.

Cody has taken the food program to a new level for Mason County. He is participating in the Food and Drug Administration's food standardization project. He wrote 3 federal grant applications and got 2 of them funded. One was for him to travel to an FDA training and the other is to support the formation and implementation of an advisory committee. Cody has taken on the well delegation program inspecting new well construction in the county. He is also performing the 2-party well part of drinking water. Cody's training is as a health educator and he uses that training in the community. He also does our water recreation program inspecting pools and spas in the county during the season.

Maria made the solid waste program her own. Her direct but compassionate approach has gotten cases that have been open for years closed. Because the state funding for her program got tied up in the Capitol budget she took on the Group A sanitary survey program to fill the void. She learned it quickly and completed the tasks left when the previous staff person retired mid-year last year. Maria also backed Katie in the vector program. Maria left us on May 18th for a job in Thurston County's Solid Waste Program. We will miss her.

We will be interviewing candidate for our 2 open positions starting this week. The current staff will take them under their wings, teach them their jobs and help them be successful. My job is currently being advertised. Actually, we need an additional EHS because of our current work load. We will be re-assigning the existing workload as the new staff come on board.

We also support nearly two clerical positions. **Shelly** performs our scanning and records requests. **Kim** does data entry for the food program, receives and receipts in permits, sends out our mailings and is our face to the public.

We are so lucky to have this amazing staff on board. They will carry my vision of Environmental Public Health forward and for that I am hopeful as I begin the next phase of my life where every day is Saturday!