

Part III – What is Public Health

By Arizona Department of Environmental Quality

Looking at the bright, bustling Chiricahua Plaza in Springerville today, one would never know that the land beneath it was a public health hazard only six years ago.

When the property was graded for construction of the office complex, the developer uncovered two rusting underground storage tanks, once used to store fuel. The Town of Springerville contacted the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality and ADEQ quickly removed the tanks, performed necessary environmental testing, and filled the pits with clean soil.

That is only one example of hundreds around the state where ADEQ has fulfilled its mission “to protect public health and the environment.” We are here to help you.

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Public health programs are designed to promote and protect the health and well-being of whole communities. A healthy environment supports healthy communities.

Air quality in the United States started to become a problem early in the 20th Century when there were no regulations controlling air pollutants. Since the 1960s, many laws and regulations have been enacted to protect people and the environment from air pollution, resulting in dramatic improvements in air quality within Arizona and nationwide. These laws continue to be important as scientists learn more about how air pollution damages public health and the environment.

Pollution impacting public health can make its way into our water through sources like pipes and run-off from

construction, farming, recreation and mining.

Environmental laws are in place to protect the quality of Arizona's streams, lakes, rivers, underground water supplies and drinking water sources from pollution.

Spills of waste and chemicals can also adversely impact the environment. Spills are cleaned up rapidly to protect our communities. Illegal dumping poses a risk to public health and wildlife, contaminates soil and water, hurts property values, reduces enjoyment of the outdoors and burdens local governments.

Recycling helps extend our supply of natural resources and energy, frees up landfill space and contributes to clean, vibrant communities. Arizonans are encouraged to “reduce,

reuse and recycle.” Businesses using fewer toxic substances reduce generation of hazardous waste.

Cities and towns play a significant role in public health.

Local governments provide drinking water, sewer collection and treatment and garbage disposal and are subject to environmental laws. ADEQ has a program to make it easier for Arizona’s small, rural governments to comply with these laws called the Small Communities Environmental Compliance Assistance Program. This program is a partnership between ADEQ and small communities, and promotes and protects the environment and public health. Arizona’s small cities and towns and special improvement districts are encouraged to apply to participate in the program. Information is available online at

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<http://www.azdeq.gov/function/compliance/smallcomm.html>.

ADEQ is appreciative of opportunities to work with citizens, businesses and local governments in Northeastern Arizona, to ensure the health and welfare of Arizonans, and the quality of our air, water and land resources. We have a community liaison, Byron James, based in St. Johns, to help identify local needs and respond to them quickly. To contact Mr. James, call (928) 337-3565, or e-mail bfj@azdeq.gov.