

# CHAPTER 7:

## Field Services and Assistance Division

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The purpose of the Field Services and Assistance Division is to provide information and assistance to the public and the regulated community, as well as to work in partnership with other agency programs to conduct inspections, maintain monitoring programs, and manage specific projects. With regard to performing inspections, operating monitoring programs, and managing projects, Field Services staff coordinates all activities with the Agency's Air Quality, Land Management, Water Quality and Water Permits Divisions. Many of the agency's field activities occur out of NDEQ offices located in Omaha, Norfolk, Chadron, Scottsbluff, North Platte, Grand Island, and Holdrege.



*The annual Power Summit is organized by NDEQ and the Nebraska Public Power District. For more information, see page 91.*

In addition to the Field Offices, the Division consists of the following programs: Small Business and Public Assistance, Emergency Response, Homeland Security, and Quality Assurance. Descriptions of these programs follow.

### **Field Offices**

The NDEQ Field Office Section is responsible for conducting compliance inspections, complaint investigations, environmental sampling, project management, and local compliance assistance for the agency's Air Quality, Land Management, and Water Quality divisions. The number of inspections and other duties performed by field office staff are incorporated in the charts and graphs provided by other divisions in the previous chapters. There are 15 employees in seven field offices around the state. The field offices enable the agency to provide the public and regulated facilities with greater access to NDEQ staff and provide more timely response to issues raised by the public. Additionally, because Field Office staff live and work in their respective Field Office areas, they are able to help the Lincoln Office develop a better understanding of local issues.

One of NDEQ's goals is to have a strong community presence and build relationships with the public and with local entities. This is accomplished in a number of ways in the field offices. One way is by making personal one-on-one contacts with local governmental agencies that have mutual needs or responsibilities. Another way to establish a local presence is to participate on local task forces, boards of directors, and emergency planning organizations. Representatives of these organizations have reported that participating NDEQ employees add depth and insight, which is highly valued. Field office staff also build a local presence by participating in environmental

education events in their regions. Building a strong community presence helps NDEQ carry out the work of preserving the state's natural resources and serving the citizens of Nebraska.

### **Small Business and Public Assistance Program**

The Small Business and Public Assistance program (SBCAP) was created as a result of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990. Although the SBCAP was created to address air quality issues, NDEQ has provided the same compliance assistance services to Water and Land Management Division stakeholders as well.

Nebraska's SBCAP is organized into four major units: the Small Business and Public Assistance (SBPA) program, the One-Stop Permit Assistance program, the Public Advocate, and the Small Business Compliance Advisory Panel. Key activities of the program include onsite assistance visits to small businesses or individuals, development of outreach materials, hosting information workshops, and helping the regulated community understand their obligations under state and federal law.

The Program Coordinator is responsible for the Department's annual Environmental Update workshops, held this year in North Platte on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, the University of Nebraska Saunders County Extension Office on May 24<sup>th</sup>, and Norfolk on May 25<sup>th</sup>. This was the first year the Environmental Update workshop was held in two locations outside of the Omaha-Lincoln areas, as part of the Department Director's desire to get our outreach efforts to other parts of the state.

The Program Coordinator continued to work with representatives of the Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) to organize and host the annual Power Summit, which provides an opportunity to exchange information related to power production, environmental policies, programs, and issues in Nebraska. A primary objective of the Summit is to enhance the dialogue that has been established between the power industry and the associated regulatory agencies. The 2016 Power Summit was held November 16<sup>th</sup> in Lincoln, and had 70 in attendance. The 2017 Power Summit was held Oct. 31 in Lincoln, and had 73 in attendance. In addition to the Power Summit, NPPD and NDEQ also partnered on two webinars in November 2016 for economic developers throughout the state. The webinars provided participants with information and tools to assist new businesses in understanding the permit process and which permits they may need.

The One-Stop Permit Assistance Program was established to offer information and permit application assistance to the regulated community. It provides our customers with an initial point of contact and ensures that businesses are aware of the permits they will need, and that they understand the application process. The Program Coordinator conducted 11 meetings regarding nine potential projects between July 1, 2016 and June 30, 2017.

The Public Advocate serves as the ombudsman for purposes of the Clean Air Act requirements, receiving requests for regulatory information or environmental complaints from the public and ensuring the Department is accessible and responsive to public concerns. In this role, the Program Coordinator provided outreach to individuals to address specific questions and concerns. From July 2016 through June 2017, the Program Coordinator worked with two Nebraska citizens regarding complaints on manure management and soil amendment/nutrient issues.

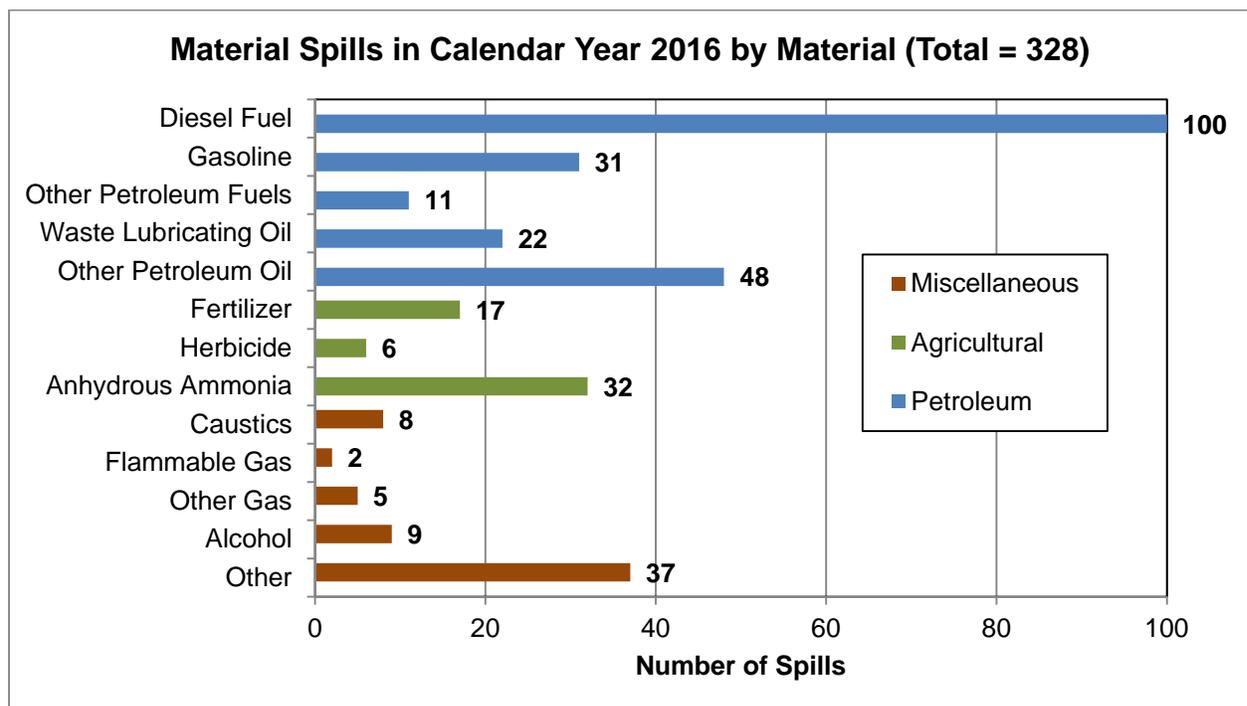
The Small Business Compliance Advisory Panel was established to evaluate the effectiveness of Department outreach programs, to provide feedback, and to identify program obstacles. The panel is composed of seven members: two representatives from the general public selected by the Governor, four representatives from small businesses selected by the Legislature, and one representative selected by the Director. The Panel members provided their annual report to the

Governor in December 2016 and met with NDEQ staff to discuss several issues during their annual meeting in March 2017. During the March meeting, panel members inquired about the status of the EPA and how federal impacts would affect the Department. Director Macy also discussed efforts the Department has made towards the Governor's "Grow Nebraska" initiative. Panel members also expressed their concerns regarding difficulties with respect to obtaining permits in a timely manner, and whether budget constraints are impacting the issuance of permits for businesses in the state. Director Macy and others updated the panel members on efforts the Department is making to address those concerns and on efforts to make the permitting process more efficient overall.

### Emergency Response Program

Through the Emergency Response Program, NDEQ staff provide technical and regulatory assistance to those responsible for spills, leaks, and accidents that pose a hazard to the environment or public health. Assistance is also provided to those at the local level who are the first on the scene at these releases; typically this is the local fire department.

The Emergency Response Program Coordinator is responsible for training, equipping and coordinating staff who, in addition to their responsibilities to other programs, provide initial documentation, assistance and response to spills. These individuals have the responsibility to maintain an emergency response system that is on call 24 hours a day. The Emergency Response Program assists in arranging for the disposal of harmful and potentially hazardous materials. The Program represents the environmental interests of the state at the scene of a petroleum/chemical spill or other environmental emergency. All personnel are members of the Nebraska Hazardous Incident Team (NHIT) and coordinate closely with the local, state and federal agencies involved in emergency response incidents. Over the past year, the Emergency Response Program responded to nine incidents and conducted nine on-site visits to these incidents.



The Emergency Response Coordinator is also responsible for training staff in the use of the NDEQ Notification system. The system is used to record both spills and complaints submitted to the Department. During the calendar year 2016, 452 complaints were entered into the system along with 328 notices of spills or releases into the environment.

The chart on the previous page shows the material spills reported to NDEQ during calendar year 2016 broken down by category of material.

### **Homeland Security**

NDEQ has been actively involved in the state's Homeland Security efforts which are directed by the Lieutenant Governor. Director Macy represents the Department on the Lieutenant Governor's Homeland Security Senior Advisory Committee. Department staff have participated in a number of Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) exercises, which often have a Homeland Security component. These exercises help the LEPCs identify training needs and response issues in need of attention. These exercises typically involve incidents related to release of agricultural chemicals, pipeline releases, and responding to and mitigating spills into surface waters of the state.