

N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

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Employees in state environmental agency receive national honors for customer service, innovation
DENR becomes only the second agency to receive two of the honors in the same year

RALEIGH - Staff in the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources recently earned national honors for two customer service initiatives, and in doing so, became only the second agency in the nation to earn this recognition twice in same year.

DENR's Integrating Environmental Customer Service initiative and its Division of Air Quality Assistance Project on Facility Pollution Reduction were honored in September with State Program Innovation Awards given by the Environmental Council of the States, or ECOS.

"The fact that North Carolina took home two of these awards in one year just shows that the agency has a lot of good, innovative thinking," said Lia Parisien, executive project manager for ECOS, the national nonprofit, nonpartisan association of state and territorial environmental agency leaders. "North Carolina is serving as a model that other states can emulate."

Prior to DENR's achievements this fall, the environmental agency for Washington D.C. was the only other organization to earn two State Program Innovation Awards in the same year, Parisien said.

ECOS solicited nominations for new, innovative programs or approaches from its 48 member states and territories. This year, ECOS received 17 nominations. ECOS recognized DENR's two programs and staff who work in those programs for helping organizations in North Carolina reduce energy usage, cut pollution and save money. ECOS also honored programs in Hawaii, Tennessee and Oregon.

DENR Secretary John Skvarla launched the Integrating Environmental Customer Service initiative in 2013 as part of the new mission Skvarla instituted soon after he was named to lead the agency by Governor Pat McCrory. Skvarla said the agency needed to do a better job of integrating a comprehensive, non-regulatory assistance program for companies and individuals interested in sustainable practices. Relying upon the department's available resources, the new secretary combined existing programs within a single customer service-oriented division, renamed the outreach division and added a work unit focused on energy efficiency in public buildings. The renamed Division of Environmental Assistance and Customer Service is a one-stop shop for businesses, industries, institutions and governmental agencies seeking help on permits, recycling, energy reduction and other areas to reduce impacts on the environment.

"We have put a premium on providing the best customer service possible in DENR at little or no cost to users," Skvarla said. "We have combined the services of several programs so that there is an efficient single point of contact for customers. When our staff provides help in one program area, they are also equipped to handle issues in other program areas or find someone quickly to address other questions."

The second recently honored initiative started in 2011 after the N.C. Division of Air Quality received an EPA grant for a multi-year project to help North Carolina facilities increase efficiency, save money and reduce air pollution. To meet its goals, the division partnered with N.C. State University's Mechanical Engineering Department and Waste Reduction Partners, which consists of a group of retired engineers. During the collaborative effort, the three groups conducted 75 energy assessments of manufacturing facilities and provided the facilities with recommendations such as tuning up boilers, replacing motors or compressors, and switching fuel. Using these recommendations, the facilities were able to reduce their energy usage and cut down on air pollution. If the facilities followed the recommendations, they could have saved more than \$6.3 million in annual costs, staff with the Division of Air Quality estimate.

"This unique collaboration created an effective program that identifies winning solutions for the environment and the economy," said Sheila Holman, director of the N.C. Division of Air Quality. "The direct contact with facility personnel and the establishment of concrete goals for energy reduction have been effective tools for achieving voluntary reductions in air pollution."

The Division of Air Quality also sponsored 10 workshops on how users of common industrial equipment can reduce energy use, operating costs and air emissions.

During a September awards presentation following the presentation of the ECOS awards, DENR honored the following staff members from the N.C. Division of Air Quality: Holman; Sushma Masemore, planning section chief; Paula Hemmer, an environmental engineer; Robin Barrows, supervisor for the Allied Programs Branch in the planning section; Adey Olatosi, an environmental engineer and Angela Terry, an office assistant.

Honored from the Division of Environmental Assistance and Customer Service were: Ted Bush, director; Scott Mouw, Community and Business Assistance Section chief; and Terry Albrecht, Waste Reduction Partners' section chief.

(NOTE: A photo of the winners from the two DENR programs is attached with this news release. From left to right, the employees in the photo are: Sushma Masemore (DAQ); Terry Albrecht (DEACS); Robin Barrows (DAQ); Sheila Holman (DAQ); DENR Secretary John Skvarla; Ted Bush (DEACS); Paula Hemmer (DAQ); Adey Olatosi (DAQ) and Scott Mouw (DEACS). The photo was taken in the Green Square office building, DENR's Raleigh headquarters).



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