

VIEWS & INFORMATION ON ENVIRONMENTAL WORKPLACE SAFETY

VIEWS



SPOTLIGHT ON: Bureau of Customer Services (BCS) Water Use Inspectors

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OEHSC Training Specialist



BCS Water Inspectors Barron Manning,
Denise Mitchell, and Sal Salerno

Do you have an interesting job here at DEP? The Bureau of Customer Service Water Use Inspectors certainly do. Three dedicated and professional inspectors shared information about their jobs with OEHSC Training Specialist Seena Sweet. Mr. Sal Salerno, Mr. Barron Manning and Ms. Denise Mitchell visited OEHSC to tell us about their work here at DEP and share an expertise garnered by over 40 years of combined experience on the job.

What are the job duties of a BCS Water Use Inspector?

After receiving their work assignments in the morning, BCS inspectors head out into the field for the day. The

assignments may come from the Call Center, 311, or they may be rescheduled appointments from a supervisor or the Commissioner.

The assignments are scheduled inspection or repair visits to locations in all five boroughs. Depending on the borough, inspectors may have anywhere from 3 to 12 appointments, and each appointment entails its own particular challenges. Manhattan, for instance, may be especially difficult due to traffic and parking.

Appointments may require changing meters, detecting house leaks, responding to complaints and emergencies (such as leaking water, service leaks, street leaks), resolving billing complaints, doing light plumbing work, replacing defective meters and installing new meter parts. Unless a job requires some backup (lifting a large meter, for example), inspectors usually work alone.

Equipment typically used on the job includes: hammer drills, sawz-all, jumper cables, concrete cutters, grinders, ladders and a variety of hand tools. Inspectors must be proficient in the use of these tools to insure that the job gets done.

The busiest times of year for BCS Water Use Inspectors are tax lien season in April, in the summer when droughts occur, and the winter. In the winter, the inspectors informed us, there may be emergencies all day and all night. It's a 24/7 job, even when there are no calls for emergency repairs.

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Expanded Enforcement of Idling Violations

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Have you seen the new anti-idling announcements popping up around the City and wondered why all the attention now?

A campaign is underway to raise the awareness of the environmental and health effects caused by unnecessary idling.

The public awareness campaign is getting the message out by radio and signs on buses and billboards, because research has shown that constant reminders significantly improve compliance rates. The campaign is coupled with expanded enforcement of anti-idling regulations.

So, what is Idling?

Idling [i'-dliŋ]: running the engine of a vehicle while it is not going anywhere.

What is the Law in New York City?

Since 1971, New York City has had regulations against idling for more than three minutes. Enforcement is the responsibility of DEP's Bureau of Environmental Compliance (BEC), Air, Noise, Policy Enforcement and Permitting (ANPEP). The NYPD is also authorized to enforce the Administrative Code. A recent law has reduced that time to 60 seconds in school zones.

The law reads: No person shall cause or permit the engine of a motor vehicle to idle for longer than three minutes, except for legally authorized emergency vehicles and buses when the temperature is less than 400 °F. Idling by any vehicle for more than one minute adjacent to a school is against the NYC law. [NYC Admin Code § 24-163]

The new law seeks to cut air pollution by cutting the allowed idling time from three minutes to 60 seconds around schools. The definition of school includes any building or structure, playground, athletic field or other property that is part of a private or public school. Another recently enacted law gives more City agencies the power to issue violations. It also requires an annual violations report by the Environmental Control Board so that enforcement can be tracked.

BEC Air/Noise Inspectors continue to enforce the new requirements. But under a recently passed law, the delegation agreements have been codified and so the inspectors now have help from the Departments of Parks and Recreation and Sanitation. Both agencies now have the authority to issue idling violations. The NYPD also maintains its authority.

Idling Causes Air Pollution

Vehicle emissions are one of the three main sources of air pollution in New York City. Vehicle exhaust contains more than 40 hazardous air pollutants. According to reports, idling vehicles generate 130,000 tons of carbon dioxide, 6,400 tons of carbon monoxide, 940 tons of nitrogen oxide, and 24 tons of soot particles. Emissions are present and harmful, even when the exhaust cannot be seen. A vehicle does not have to have dark smoke coming out of its tailpipe to be part of the problem.

Idling is unhealthy

Breathing in exhaust can aggravate pre-existing respiratory illnesses such as asthma and emphysema, allergies, and cardiovascular diseases. Children are more sensitive to air pollution because they breathe in more air per pound of body weight than adults, and so the focus is on school zones.

What Can Drivers Do to Help?

- ☒ Don't idle.
- ☒ Drive the vehicle to warm it up.
- ☒ Dress for the season.
- ☒ Avoid drive-thru windows.
- ☒ At home, do not use remote starters.
- ☒ Spread the word.

Other Compliance Initiatives regarding idling Vehicles

- 1) Community involvement in identifying and reporting idling hot-spots.
- 2) An increased field inspection presence in locations where excessive idling is likely to occur.
- 3) Citizens calling in idling violations (311). In 2008, BEC received 2,230 such complaints. This number is likely to increase in 2009 with increased awareness that idling is illegal.

One word of caution to DEP drivers: BEC receives complaints about idling DEP vehicles. Drivers beware: DEP vehicles are not exempt from the law. Only emergency vehicles in active service and engines used to operate loading, unloading, or processing devices are exempt. So set a good example, and turn the engine off.

This article is dedicated to the DEP BEC Air/Noise Inspectors for their hard work and dedication. In concluding, a quick safety alert for them: Keep safe! Observe vehicles from the curbside and have drivers come to you. If you have to go into the street, make sure you are wearing your traffic vest.

Audit Findings and Their Role in Fostering a Culture of Health and Safety at DEP

Sabrina Arjune


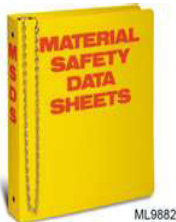
Training Specialist, OEHS

Since its inception in 2003, OEHS's EH&S Auditing Division has conducted full regulatory compliance audits at over three hundred DEP facilities. In BWS and BWSO, there are about 350 facilities and OEHS Auditing has completed audits at most of them. OEHS is currently working on the 14 BWT Water Pollution Control Plants and will have all audits completed by July of 2009.

The EHS Audit program is committed to ensuring that the agency is in full compliance with all applicable federal, State, and local EHS regulations. An integral feature of this commitment is fostering a culture of health and safety within the organization. OEHS auditors provide informal training to facility personnel in compliance requirements and procedures; it is expected that these informal learning experiences will prompt staff to take a proactive role in preventing injuries and guarding against illnesses by correcting deficiencies common at DEP facilities.

To support this initiative, V.I.E.W.S. will feature a series of brief, informative articles highlighting some of the most common and preventable problems found at DEP facilities (findings), with recommendations on how facility managers as well as employees can take action to remedy the deficiencies.

This quarter's findings feature Lack of Signage to Identify Drum Materials and Missing Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for Chemicals, and what to do about these recurrent problems.

Finding	DEP Policy	Recommendation
Lack of signage to identify drum materials 	<u>Hazard Communication Program – Section 5.4</u> The Responsible Individual or their designee shall ensure that proper hazardous chemical labels providing essential information on chemical identity and hazards are present when received from the supplier and are maintained on the container through the product's ultimate use or disposal...employees shall not remove, deface, or cover labels attached to a container by the product's manufacturer unless the container is empty and is being managed in accordance with DEP waste management procedures.	If an adequate manufacturer's label is missing, illegible, or damaged , DEP employees shall notify the Responsible Individual (RI) assigned to the job. The Responsible Individual must consult the MSDS and contact the manufacturer to determine label requirements and affix a new label on the container consistent with the original manufacturer's label.
Missing MSDS for chemicals on site 	<u>Hazard Communication Program – Section 5.3</u> The Responsible Individual for each workplace with hazardous/ toxic substances shall ensure that at least one MSDS binder and HTSL is compiled and updated as necessary for all hazardous/toxic substances found at the facility.	If an MSDS has not been provided for any hazardous chemical used, the RI must request a copy from the manufacturer or distributor. If an MSDS, in compliance with 29 CFR 1910.1200 is not available, contact Bureau EHS to obtain additional hazard information to include in the MSDS binder from NYSDOH, EPA's Chemical Substances Information Network, and the Health Hazard Evaluation Program of the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health.

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Because of the dense workload of inspection and repair, DEP sometimes contracts specific jobs. Yet BCS inspectors pride themselves on getting to the job site quickly, and once inspectors complete an assignment, they immediately generate accurate bills. As Mr. Salerno informed us: “We know the problem and we’ll get it fixed right, and right away. The customer is satisfied when the problem is resolved, and they will receive a correct bill right away too.”

What are some of the more interesting aspects of your work?

The three inspectors agreed that the most interesting aspect of their job was the opportunity to visit many different types of buildings and landmarks in the city. For example, Mr. Manning and Mr. Salerno read the meters for the historic Andrew Jackson home in Uptown Harlem. Ms. Mitchell mentioned the excitement of going into the Treasury Building and seeing the bars of gold.

Describe some challenges of your job.

BCS Water Use Inspectors face various hazards at the sites they inspect. Hazards may include abandoned buildings, difficult access to a building, filthy conditions, vermin such as ticks, fleas and mosquitoes, dogs, hostile customers, poor lighting, cracks in floors, climbing, trip, slip and fall hazards, and dangerously confined spaces.

If a location is unsafe, inspectors will wisely not enter the premises. Instead, they will report it immediately to their supervisor. Mr. Manning said that on-the-job experience teaches you when a location is unsafe to enter, such as being told that the meter to be repaired lies at the dark end of a narrow tunnel. “You don’t go into such a structure,” he said, “it’s just not safe.” Mr. Salerno said that Manhattan has more complex buildings than in the other boroughs, so the building water meters may be located in super sub-basements or cooling towers on the roofs of buildings. Ms. Mitchell mentioned that extreme weather conditions pose difficulties on the job as well.

How have you been able to meet some of these challenges?

Mr. Manning said that his years of experience have helped him to face the day-to-day challenges of the job. In addition to the knowledge that hands-on experience brings to the job, inspectors receive various types of training, such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) training, Field Right to Know, Confined Space Training, and Communication Skills Training. Some of the PPE they use on the job includes earplugs, helmets, goggles, insulated, steel-toed boots, tyvex suits and rubber, suede, or reinforced gloves.

Ms. Mitchell said that communication skills training is very useful because of the many different personalities they encounter on a daily basis, each appointment being a different communication situation that the inspector must handle.

What are the most rewarding aspects of your job?

The inspectors told us that they liked working outdoors. They all agreed that helping people and developing good relationships with the public was the best part of their job.

To demonstrate this, Mr. Salerno described a situation when, in the middle of winter, he went to the home of an elderly woman whose water meter was broken and the pipes in her house had frozen. He said she was alone and scared. When he arrived, he quickly repaired the meter. He said she was grateful and relieved and that he felt that he had lifted a huge burden from her shoulders. He felt happy that he was able to assist her. He said, “People love seeing the DEP truck roll around because they know the job will get done.”

Ms. Mitchell said that she felt “most rewarded when she is able to resolve problems and the customer is satisfied.”

Mr. Manning enjoys the variety that the job brings. He tells us that: “Each day brings different experiences and you never know what the next day will bring.”

What are some of the qualities you should possess to be a BCS Water Use Inspector?

Inspectors should like being outdoors, have an outgoing and friendly personality, have good communication skills, have patience, have the ability to provide quality customer service, be mechanically inclined--and not be afraid to get their hands dirty.

Mr. Salerno characterized the job this way: “The DEP BCS is like a Mom & Pop Store vs. a Conglomerate. We provide personalized and professional service; we put a face on what DEP does.

At DEP, everyone is responsible for safety. If you or anyone on your team is concerned about your working conditions, it's okay to ask your supervisor or your bureau's EH&S liaison how they can help. If you've still got questions, you can call the EH&S Employee Concerns Hotline. It's DEP's responsibility to acknowledge and fix unsafe situations, procedures, and practices. With your help, we'll not only get the job done, we'll make it safer for ourselves, our coworkers, our families, and our city.

CALL (800) 897-9677 OR SEND A MESSAGE THROUGH PIPELINE. HELP IS ON THE WAY.