

*Kathleen Sisneros is the division director of the Water and Waste Management Division of the New Mexico Environment Department. In this capacity she oversees pollution control and hazardous waste programs as well as administering the newly created Oversight Program. She received both her B.S. and M.S. in chemistry from New Mexico Highlands University.*

## TRAINING NEEDS OF THE NEW MEXICO ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT

*Kathleen Sisneros  
New Mexico Environment Department  
PO Box 26110  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502*

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you my thoughts on the ways in which various agencies can help the New Mexico Environment Department and other environmental related agencies meet our future hiring needs. Since the theme of the conference is *Working For the Future*, it is important to note that the only way we will be able to work in the future is if we have adequately trained staff. Beyond that, we need more than "book learning" about environmental issues. We need a real-world sense of those issues — a sense of practical application of what the textbooks can so eloquently present in theory.

Let me give you a practical application of my comments, as well. Yes, we need scientists; yes, we need biologists. We need chemists; we need health physicists. We even need engineers and we need them trained in the state-of-the-art technology that changes the way we do things on an almost daily basis. But we also need some of these environmental technicians to have a background in economics. I'm not saying that all our personnel should be economists; but certainly, they should be exposed to economics courses in their training. Much of what we do today is influenced by economics—whether the action is one of prevention or remediation.

Cross-disciplinary programs would also be helpful. Many years ago, when I first started with the department's predecessor, the Environmental Improvement Division, the only groups that really challenged our actions were industry. However, we now find many permittees, such as local govern-

ments, have developed good expertise in the environmental area. Oftentimes, the concerns expressed by permittees center around economics. We must be prepared to defend our actions and demonstrate that they are indeed justified.

It would be helpful for environmental scientists and engineers to have some exposure or training in Indian law. Recent amendments to several federal statutes (Clean Water Act; Safe Drinking Water Act; Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act) have authorized the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to treat Indian tribes as states for several sections of these laws. Setting surface water quality standards is the area that seems to have drawn the greatest interest in New Mexico. Several tribes in New Mexico have proposed their own surface water quality standards. These proposed standards are generally more stringent than those adopted by the New Mexico Water Quality Control Commission. Staff familiar with the basics of tribal law and tribal sovereignty would greatly benefit our department.

We also need environmentally trained personnel graduating from New Mexico universities to have a trait I'm not sure you can teach: common sense. We need people who are not so specialized in their chosen field that they can't see the big picture. All aspects and approaches to solving problems must be considered and evaluated.

How can you help us? I believe cooperative relationships between the universities and our department are crucial. We need an ongoing dia-

logue. As environmental protection technology advances, we need to ensure that schools are not left behind. We need universities to recognize that environmental careers will be a growth area of employment and they should tailor their programs appropriately. We need top-level university support to make these recommendations happen. Real-world experience and training in the environmental field such as that provided by government intern programs are invaluable to our department.

Field trips to observe wastewater treatment plants, water supply systems, landfills, remediation projects, or even unremediated sites could help students visualize what they are taught in the classroom. I also would encourage you to attend board and commission meetings that promulgate the state's environmental regulations; that is, the Environmental Improvement Board and the New Mexico Water Quality Control Commission. Students should be encouraged to not only attend the meetings, but to participate in discussions. Perhaps students could present their research findings to these decision-making groups. Students should also attend and participate in legislative committee meetings.

Finally, as many of you already know, EPA is making environmental education a priority, from grade school through higher education. We must ensure that New Mexico schools follow that directive. Only by nurturing the desire and interest of our kids in environmental issues throughout school will we ever have the trained workforce we need in the future.