

OFFICE OF DEM OMBUDSMAN

Draft FY2002 WORK PLAN

I. Program Description:

The primary responsibility of the Ombudsman is to help the Department improve its effectiveness, efficiency and accountability, and to increase both external and internal support. Towards this goal, the Ombudsman is charged with authority to undertake independent, and in certain cases confidential, fact-finding in response to external or internal complaints or questions about the Department's performance. The Ombudsman will facilitate resolution of complaints in coordination with Department staff and management, and will make recommendations to the Director on matters that cannot be resolved through such coordination. The Ombudsman is responsible for ensuring that the fact-finding process is perceived and experienced as an independent, impartial, fair and credible process.

In addition to independently investigating internal and external complaints, the Ombudsman may assist Department managers in efforts to resolve problems or improve on programs, policies and regulations. The Ombudsman is expected to turn the results of his independent fact-finding into feedback for such efforts.

II. Mission of Program:

To create an environment within DEM where program innovation is fostered, processes are streamlined and customer service is improved.

III. Program highlights

The following are the major highlights and initiatives being implemented by the Ombudsman in support of the Departments goals:

- ◆ Co-ordination of the development of a DEM Outreach and Public Participation Plan that:
 - Targets recommendations on this issue that were recommended by the Permit Streamlining Task Forces,
 - Explains DEM regulatory expectations of permitting / approval processes,
 - Coordinates materials and engages DEM employees in outreach and public participation activities
- ◆ Development of a department-wide policy and system to solicit customer feedback.
- ◆ Continue with the evaluation of the permitting processes of the environmental programs. To date, the Wetlands program has been evaluated and the ISDS and Waste Programs have active Working Groups evaluating issues from the Task Forces. The purpose of these evaluations is to eliminate unproductive requirements and procedures, to coordinate and consolidate permit processes, where possible and to explore general permits and self-certification programs. These evaluations will be conducted through the involvement of members of the regulated, environmental and municipal communities that are impacted by the regulatory program. The Task Forces meet on a regular basis and the Ombudsman is charged with the coordination of the meetings and working groups, the preparation of the draft and final report that detail the recommendations of the streamlining effort and ensuring that information is disseminated to the public through the Ombudsman's website.
- ◆ Continue to develop opportunities to meet with members of the public and the regulated community to listen to their concerns and to help inform them about the program direction of the agency. Outreach activities include meeting with business and environmental groups on an ad hoc basis and planning and coordinating quarterly meetings of the Business and Environmental Roundtables.

- ◆ Continue to respond to public concerns about actions of the department. These concerns are raised through phone calls and e-mails from the public. These concerns will be investigated to resolve the individual problem, but more importantly, to determine if processes within the department should be modified to prevent these occurrences from happening in the future.
- ◆ Continue to track DEM's efforts in the implementation of permit tracking / streamlining efforts. Work with the programs to evaluate Kyran's permit tracking system and the EPA One-Stop grant as opportunities to continue the process of self-improvement of the permitting process.
- ◆ Continue to work on DEM agency or bureau wide initiatives to improve the operation or performance of the agency. Projects include developing agency policy concerning public access to records and vehicle use policy; working with other DEM units to evaluate implementation of EPA's Quality Management Plan.

IV. Key Objectives and Strategies

In order to meet the program mission and department goals and strategic priorities, two general objectives have been identified which are critical to planning activities and setting program priorities.

- ◆ To evaluate environmental programs to increase productivity of the permitting processes.
- ◆ To meet with the regulated, and the environmental communities and the public to gather feedback on ways to improve the delivery of services of the agency.

OBJECTIVE: Improve DEM's accessibility , responsiveness, public outreach and participation		ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATOR(S):
STRATEGY	ACTIVITIES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
Strategy 1: Increase the public's access to Departmental information by providing copies of appropriate permits, permit applications, grant applications, submissions, draft Compliance Agreements, policies and meetings on the DEM's website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post all available permit and grant applications on the website. • Collect and review all appropriate DEM regulatory policies. Eliminate outdated policies. • Post index of DEM policies. • Post policies available in electronic form. • Continually improve the accessibility of the DEM WebPages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of permit and grant applications posted by August 1, 2001. • Report the number of policies collected and reviewed by July 31, 2001. • Index of policies posted by September 1, 2001. • Number of policies posted on the website by September 1 by November 1, 2001. • Continually update the Ombudsman homepage with information concerning the work and the work products of the Environmental Task Forces. • Publish meeting notes and post meeting information on DEM's Website concerning the Environmental and Business Roundtables. • Develop a public focus group that advises the Department on the information needs of the general public.
Strategy 2: Develop the capability to submit electronic applications for permits, grants, submissions, and draft Compliance Agreements etc. on DEM's website. This includes the ability to accept electronic payments for associated costs and using electronic signatures for submission of documents.	Participate in the MIS steering committee that is developing among other things, the future e-government initiatives for the department. Focus my involvement on policies relating to the enhancement of the public's ability to interact with the department through electronic means.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of Departmental processes that are set up to conduct electronic submission of documents by June 30, 2002. • Number of Departmental processes that are set up to facilitate electronic payment of fees by June 30, 2002.
Strategy 3. Assess and improve customer service activities in DEM.	Develop a department-wide policy and system to solicit customer feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct customer survey by December 31, 2001 • Prepare report of the results of the customer survey that includes recommendations for future changes by March 31, 2002.
Strategy 4. Increase awareness of DEM's role in environmental protection and promote an understanding of how actions effect environmental quality.	<p>Co-ordinate the development of a DEM Outreach and Public Participation Plan that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targets recommendations of the various Permit Streamlining Task Forces, • Explains DEM regulatory expectations of permitting / approval processes, • Coordinates materials and engages DEM employees in outreach and public participation activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a DEM-wide public outreach program by March 31, 2002. • Begin to implement a DEM-wide public outreach program by May 1, 2002
Strategy 5: Expand and improve partnerships and opportunities for Rhode Islanders to participate in environmental decision-making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ordinate four quarterly Business and Environmental Roundtables and Roundtable Newsletters. 	Organize four meeting of each Roundtable in the following time periods: July 2001, September / October 2001, January / February 2002 and June 2002.

OBJECTIVE: Improve accountability		ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATOR(S): Public understanding and support for the departments programs.
STRATEGY	ACTIVITIES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
Provide a mechanism to the public to assess and review departmental activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide for an independent review of complaints that are generated by the public or by DEM employees. • Determine permit decision-making timelines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and publish an annual report to the public on the activities of the Ombudsman by December 31, 2001. • Prepare a yearly report to the public on DEM permit decision-making by December 31, 2001.

OBJECTIVE: Make regulatory process less burdensome, more streamlined and productive		ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATOR(S):
STRATEGY	ACTIVITIES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
Complete evaluation of the permitting programs in the Department to determine if there are regulatory, policy or administrative changes that can be instituted to improve environmental protection and reduce permit decision times.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue evaluation of the Waste Programs using a stakeholder process. • Determine the customer satisfaction of the remaining permitting programs to evaluate the opportunities to streamline these processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete final report of the Waste Site Remediation Task Force by October 2001 that recommends regulatory, policy and administrative changes that streamlines the decision-making process and increases the environmental effectiveness of the programs. • Develop and conduct a survey of sources / facilities that have been issued DEM permits, approvals etc. to determine the need for additional Streamlining Task Forces.