

2000 PEER Survey of Montana
Department of Environmental Quality Employees

In January, PEER mailed surveys to all Montana DEQ employees. PEER has thus far received 103 responses of the 347 sent out--a 30 percent rate of return. Surveys continue to arrive daily. Below are the results.

REORGANIZATION & RESOURCES

1. The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has sufficient resources to fulfill its environmental mandates.

4% strongly agree 22% agree 7% no opinion 47% disagree 21% strongly disagree

2. The 1996 reorganization that formed DEQ has improved operations of the affected divisions.

3% strongly agree 24% agree 14% no opinion 31% disagree 28% strongly disagree

3. Montana's environment is better protected as a result of the reorganization creating DEQ.

5% strongly agree 20% agree 19% no opinion 31% disagree 24% strongly disagree

ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT

4. The current state administration has demonstrated a commitment to protecting Montana's natural resources.

7% strongly agree 35% agree 5% no opinion 30% disagree 24% strongly disagree

5. DEQ consistently takes enforcement action against serious environmental violators.

11% strongly agree 25% agree 16% no opinion 24% disagree 24% strongly disagree

6. Please check the statement that best describes the approach of DEQ's Enforcement Division (check one):

- 1% excessively aggressive response of disproportionate severity
 - 27% correct level of response appropriate to the severity of the violation
 - 20% uneven and variable response sometimes inappropriate to the violation
 - 12% weak level of response to many reported violations
 - 25% response varies according to political considerations
 - 15% don't know
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POLITICAL INFLUENCE

7. DEQ allows the regulated community to excessively influence permitting, policy or enforcement decisions.

19% *strongly agree* 31% *agree* 17% *no opinion* 23% *disagree* 10% *strongly disagree*

8. DEQ administration listens to input from environmental groups.

3% *strongly agree* 52% *agree* 19% *no opinion* 20% *disagree* 5% *strongly disagree*

9. Scientific evaluations are influenced by political considerations at DEQ.

17% *strongly agree* 37% *agree* 19% *no opinion* 18% *disagree* 9% *strongly disagree*

10. Industry lobbyists and lawyers are able to receive preferential treatment for their clients after meeting with DEQ management.

23% *strongly agree* 23% *agree* 24% *no opinion* 24% *disagree* 5% *strongly disagree*

MANAGEMENT

11. DEQ Administrators are selected for their knowledge and experience in environmental protection.

3% *strongly agree* 29% *agree* 12% *no opinion* 36% *disagree* 20% *strongly disagree*

12. In my experience, important policy and operational questions are resolved quickly and fairly by the Director.

1% *strongly agree* 30% *agree* 20% *no opinion* 27% *disagree* 22% *strongly disagree*

13. I would characterize DEQ as a well managed agency.

1% *strongly agree* 27% *agree* 7% *no opinion* 34% *disagree* 30% *strongly disagree*

ACCOUNTABILITY

14. In my experience, the DEQ Director generally provides accurate information to the public.

5% *strongly agree* 38% *agree* 23% *no opinion* 25% *disagree* 10% *strongly disagree*

15. Montana needs a state law to protect state workers from retaliation for disclosure of waste, fraud, abuse of authority or violation of law in the workplace.

30% *strongly agree* 29% *agree* 26% *no opinion* 15% *disagree* 1% *strongly disagree*

16. I fear retaliation from my chain-of-command for advocating enforcement of environmental laws.

27% *yes* 6% *no opinion* 66% *no*

TURNOVER

17. The level of staff attrition at DEQ during the past 5 years has been:

27% *abnormally high* 44% *high* 27% *average* 2% *low* 0% *abnormally low*

18. The effectiveness of DEQ has been hampered by the departure of experienced staff over the past few years.

26% *strongly agree* 42% *agree* 12% *no opinion* 18% *disagree* 2% *strongly disagree*

19. Staff turnover has been more a function of employees escaping a hostile work environment at DEQ than the availability of better professional opportunities elsewhere.

15% *strongly agree* 26% *agree* 16% *no opinion* 25% *disagree* 18% *strongly disagree*

20. DEQ staff who, in the past few years, made highly public departures from DEQ were accurate in their criticisms of management.

22% *strongly agree* 26% *agree* 27% *no opinion* 16% *disagree* 10% *strongly disagree*

MORALE

21. The Directors and Administrators at DEQ back up employees who make hard decisions.

5% *strongly agree* 35% *agree* 13% *no opinion* 32% *disagree* 16% *strongly disagree*

22. DEQ management encourages its employees to express their opinions regarding department operations, policies and decisions.

4% *strongly agree* 25% *agree* 17% *no opinion* 32% *disagree* 22% *strongly disagree*

23. Morale at DEQ is:

2% *excellent* 20% *good* 4% *no opinion* 32% *fair* 42% *low*

I am a (check one)

23% current employee of DEQ, less than 5 years service

77% current employee of DEQ, 5 years or more service

*2000 Montana DEQ Survey
Essay Question Responses*

In my opinion, the most critical environmental issue confronting the next administration is . . .

CLEAN AIR AND WATER (9 Responses)

Protecting water and air with an increasing population

Deteriorating water quality in Montana.

Developing an accurate impaired streams list (303d)

Water quality, remediation of habitat.

Sufficient staffing for compliance review (Air Quality) in the Helena offices. Monies for database development and implementation.

Stronger CAFO laws and rules, and more people in water protection.

Clean Water

Pollution

Control of non-point pollution sources

SPRAWL AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT (8 Responses)

Growth management--designing urban and suburban growth to minimize environmental impacts and promote energy efficiency. Relates to air pollution and surface & ground water.

Adequate assessment of cumulative effects of subdivisions on ground water quality and quantity.

Subdivisions, they're eating up agricultural land, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities.

Community growth planning to avoid pollution of the water tables. Mass transit to reduce and combat air pollution

Urban Sprawl--lack of land use planning

The uncontrolled subdivision of Montana

Urban sprawl as it affects nitrates and pathogens in groundwater

Stronger subdivision laws & rules.

AGENCY RESOURCES AND FUNDING (7 Responses)

Dealing with more federal regulation with no added federal funding. Increased litigation and entanglements. Increased negative attitude of minority against state workers.

Recover ground lost to weakened environmental regulations enacted by legislature and current administration and disfunctionality brought on by gutting budgets and reorganization.

Adequate monies for mined-land reclamation & stemming the pollution resulting from active & abandoned mines. I am concerned about long-term results of mining at the Golden Sunlight Mine on the Jefferson River.

Obtaining adequate funding and support for environmental programs in light of term limit legislators--to have knowledgeable legislators will require steep learning curve.

Funding an increase employee pay to a fair level consistent with the regional wages for similar jobs. Increase staffing to better handle the workload.

Limited resources and the Zortman legacy.

Developing and maintaining career employees. Lack of merit raises results in loss of buying power which discourages long-term employment.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND HAZARDOUS WASTE (6 Responses)

To ensure Montanans of their constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment.

Health impacts of pollutants like radon gas, PCBs, Solvents, etc.

Libby asbestos, superfund sites and regional haze rule

Hazardous waste issues

Preserving a clean and healthful environment

Libby asbestos

ENFORCEMENT (6 Responses)

Enforcement is currently a total joke. All people do in that division is shuffle papers around, document things, and throw the burden of enforcement responsibilities back upon the program responsible for permitting the issues/constituents of concern. The whole enforcement division needs to be gutted and reorganized.

Removing the industry=s strong influence on environmental decisions, rules, policy, enforcement and permitting. Allowing industry to Ahelp≡ write environmental rules is like having no rule. Similarly, allowing industry anything they want in a permit is not protection of either the environment OR human health.

We need to expedite enforcement with penalties--we are perceived as toothless & with the right affiliation or lawyer DEQ will back down.

Actually enforcing MT=s environmental laws

Staffing levels to enforce the laws.

Enforcing environmental laws

BALANCING THE NEEDS OF COMPETING INTERESTS (3 Responses)

End to divisive rhetoric, more constructive collaboration on protecting the amenities and resources that form the foundation of MT=S next primary industry: recreation.

To maintain objectivity in regulatory decisions in the face of irrational and unreasonable demands from both sides of the environmental protection issue.

Continued confrontation between environmentalists and sustained use advocates

MISCELLANEOUS (8 Responses)

How to rebuild confidence and morale in an agency whose staff have been absolutely and totally disregarded by a management system that does not seek input nor consensus with its technical staff. A management system rife with uncaring and sometimes incompetent individuals whose sole function is to pass reactionary edicts, made in a vacuum, from upper management down the line without any thought or input.

Scientifically based environmental concerns must take precedence over politically based concerns.

Reorganizing the DEQ back into major media divisions e.g: Air, Water, and waste

Install management at DEQ that truly believes env. protection is important & that respects all people.

Environmental extremists! Chasing our high-dollar industries out of the state and the continued attacks on all natural resource-based jobs.

Identifying environmental/conservation issues as a key component to quality of life in Montana.

Environmental Wack-os

People/Organizations requesting special treatment or favors.

If you could change one policy (management or environmental resource policy) what would it be?

LEADERSHIP (20 Responses)

The foolish way that DEQ upper management deals with tough environmental decisions. If a project action or decision is controversial and/or receives bad press, it then becomes fair game for immediate resolution by upper management. Laws, rules, staff opinions and recommendations and in-house policy & procedures are put aside and a resolution is dictated. Right or wrong, the decision is based on politics and publicity. It is not necessarily tied to science.

The unwritten staff policy that staff cannot discuss concerns with the director

Stop considering technical or policy questions asked by staff as an act of insubordination which is punishable by being put on probation or, ultimately, terminated.

Change the head-hunter attitude and methods of the personnel office into a line-employee-friendly and helpful office. The personnel office at DEQ is doing its best to berate and abuse line staff. They get their direction from . . .?

Allow technically knowledgeable employees to manage professional in environmental enforcement and regulatory positions. Current accepted policy gives preference to poorly trained management interns with political or Aold boy≡ connections.

Restructure of reorganization to eliminate Racicot=s DEQ Amachine≡ personnel and bring back some sort of function--i.e.: Its broke. Please fix it.

It would be nice to eliminate political influence on decision making process. This will never happen, so how about installing management that has the integrity to make sound environmental decisions while considering all sides of an issue equally and fairly.

Management policies that currently do not allow for professional growth and income over time. Biggest hardship is retraining people to relearn old lessons--workload is incredibly huge. Other problems: Personalities. Jan Sensibaugh & Curt Chisolm try to run rampant here. Staff is so preoccupied with not Ascrewing up≡ that devotion to job is poor. These two (Sensibaugh especially) are not willing to work

to the Dept.'s best interests--just carve out their own kingdoms. This attitude trickles down through (her) staff. Yuk.

Get rid of Mark Simonich but more importantly Curt Chisolm!!

The only team at DEQ that seems to function is the management team. They are trying to do it all and failing because they do not use the rest of us effectively.

Curt Chisolm!! His methods of intimidation as a management style discourage employees from expressing honest opinions. Management by intimidation.

Undoing the damage done by the Racicot/Simonich administration.

Personnel Department is non longer personal. Screw the workers-compliments don't cost, but we don't get them. Employees are wrong until proven right--No management support.

Management!

Management and resource policies are good. There are a few key individuals who should not be in the positions they are.

Require managers to have appropriate backgrounds for the programs they manage--perhaps then staff may get the support necessary to do our jobs.

Hire management staff with experience.

Putting admin-support personnel directly under Bureau Chiefs. Having them as a separate group is hard on Bureaus and results in confusion of who is the boss, poor morale and hard feelings when work can't be achieved. This is mainly due to mis-communication between admin supervisors and Bureau Chiefs.

Cease micro-management

Put personnel policies in force. When there are problems, and they are reported, nothing is ever done to fix things.

INFLUENCE OF INDUSTRY (8 Responses)

I would not let responsible parties receive preferential treatment or dictate how MT's environmental regulations apply or do not apply to them. Employees would not be removed off of difficult sites because they are enforcing the law.

Severely limit campaign contributions from big industry and eliminate political paybacks. You scratch my back--I'll scratch yours-type government. Let's do what is good and right for the state, not big business.

To dissolve all committees (i.e. Clean Air Advisory Committee or CAAC) that are run by industry so that their influence is not seen in the rules that are supposed to protect the people, health, and the environment. To discontinue the DEQ's unwritten policies of allowing or permitting industry out of violations.

I would abandon the policy of tolerating a pro-industry stance among the technical staff at DEQ. Management is not the immediate problem. The problem is the 'go along to get along' attitude that is rampant among the technical staff. This needs to be actively and consistently discouraged.

Not to be so industry-friendly when it comes to application of environmental law. But that comes from the governor's office, not just DEQ administration.

Industry groups like Farm Bureau, Stockgrowers, and Wood Products Assoc. have too much influence in director's office.

Keep politics out of cleanup actions!

Put the burden of the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) on the regulated community, not the state agencies.

AGENCY RESOURCES (5 Responses)

The main problem at DEQ is lack of staffing & resources needed to do the job. Workloads of staff would require 3-4 people to do the job now assigned to 1 individual.

Don't allow state primacy for environmental regulations unless staff and resources are allocated to administer, otherwise existing environmental program administration and compliance suffers

Make it easier for programs to share money.

Allowing some positions to telecommute part-time. Develop educational contacts for employees with the department to earn, i.e. masters degrees, e.g. chemical engineers.

Allow me to work at home or/and telecommute.

PAY/HIRING (5 Responses)

Change the state's hiring and promotion system so that people can grow within their positions. Currently, if a person wants to improve their range or pay, they must leave their position to go to a different one. The state loses that person's experience in their position and retrain a new employee. The state doesn't pay enough to make such a stupid system workable.

Pay people (not just the upper management) a decent wage w/ annual raises 7 1/2%. When Racicot gave himself a 24% raise every employee should have received a comparable raise

Increase pay (by providing pay exceptions similar to Dept. Of Transportation) for technical professionals to reduce turnover.

I would allow middle management the ability to offer more pay to deserving employees without asking them to go and get another job offer first.

Need to pay personnel at something close to the market.

Increase wages for state workers.

ENFORCEMENT (4 Responses)

All enforcement policies. We also desperately need better nutrient standards and need to address cumulative impacts better (from developments, etc.) Also, our centralized services division needs to be gutted! We have had contracting problems for over a year. By problems I mean contractors aren't being paid for 4 months or more! And budgeting/accounting is a nightmare, too; they can blame it on the new sabhrs system, but things are way messed up!! And no one=s doing anything about it!

Enforcement action should not require all action by sections that don't deal with enforcement. Enforcement should do work of enforcement.

The enforcement division is not extremely useful or needed--they duplicate work rightfully done by the Haz. Waste Site Cleanup Bureau.

Seek legislation to grant criminal authority for Department.

REORGANIZATION (4 Responses)

Undo the functional reorganization of DEQ.

Reorganization has made it considerably more difficult to do our jobs.

Change back to media programs

Reverse the internal DEQ reorganization from 1996.

WATER REGULATIONS/LAW (5 Responses)

The Water Quality Act needs to be amended to effectively address non-point source water pollution. Policies are ok, the law needs improvement.

Water resource allocation

Cyanide ban against new mining projects in Montana.

How water permits are issued (i.e. general vs. individual)

Surface water quality

MISCELLANEOUS (*11 Responses*)

Do not ignore Montana's Constitution

Subdivision statutes and regulations--promote high density but livable communities.

Do not change a policy/law/rule/regulation because someone goes whining to the governor or DEQ's director.

Eliminate MACO quarterly meetings A.K.A. the employee bashing sessions.

Extreme application of the Montana Environmental Policy Act to hamper every permit decision.

Non-degradation review methodology

That Montana can have a strong environmental ethic that works hand in hand with a strong economy. Yes, we can have both!

The legal process or length of time to enforce an action.

Equality! All the anti-mining regulations and other such policies and rules that are industry targeted. Make all policies and rules apply to all areas, irregardless of which industry/sector they affect (subdivisions, mines, shopping malls, timber sales). Example: An acre of ground disturbed by a gravel is just as bad as an acre of ground disturbed by a shopping mall or house. The only difference is that a house will keep that acre disturbed for a longer time than a gravel. A reclamation plan and bond should be required on the house and shopping mall just like the gravel pit.

Public opinion is frequently based on emotional response that reflects individual perspective. I'd like to see the agency recognize these responses and address them to the extent practical instead of focusing strictly on technical aspects.

Hire more lawyers and be ready to take on both environmentalists and industry lawsuits with no fear.