

1998 PEER Survey of Michigan DEQ Employees

-PRELIMINARY RESULTS-

In September, PEER mailed surveys to all 1462 employees of the Department of Environmental Quality. PEER has thus far received **609** responses -- a **41.6 percent rate of return**. Surveys continue to arrive daily. Below are the results.

AGENCY PRIORITIES

1. Governor Engler's 1995 split of the DNR into the DNR and DEQ has resulted in greater protection for the environment.

5% Strongly Agree 2% Agree 12% No Opinion 31% Disagree 50% Strongly Disagree

2. DEQ management puts more weight on economic development than on resource protection.

52% Strongly Agree 31% Agree 6% No Opinion 6% Disagree 5% Strongly Disagree

3. DEQ management views the primary "customer" of the DEQ as the individuals and businesses who seek permits rather than the natural resources and the general public.

63% Strongly Agree 23% Agree 5% No Opinion 6% Disagree 3% Strongly Disagree

4. DEQ's primary "customer" should be the natural resources and the general public rather than the regulated community.

52% Strongly Agree 30% Agree 4% No Opinion 8% Disagree 6% Strongly Disagree

5. The DEQ has sufficient staff and funding to adequately protect public health and the environment.

5% Strongly Agree 12% Agree 7% No Opinion 29% Disagree 47% Strongly Disagree

PERMITTING

6. The regulated community excessively influences permitting decisions at DEQ.

38% Strongly Agree 32% Agree 12% No Opinion 11% Disagree 7% Strongly Disagree

7. Permit applicants have received preferential review after they or interested elected officials have visited with DEQ management regarding a proposed project.

33% Strongly Agree 30% Agree 25% No Opinion 7% Disagree 5% Strongly Disagree

8. I have been ordered by a superior to change or disregard a permitting procedure or policy based on non-scientific reasons.

14% Strongly Agree 13% Agree 42% No Opinion 15% Disagree 16% Strongly Disagree

9. I have experienced or know of an instance(s) in which a member or representative of the regulated community has been allowed to choose which DEQ employee will or will not work on their permit application(s), case(s) or file(s).

15% Strongly Agree 10% Agree 40% No Opinion 22% Disagree 13% Strongly Disagree

ENFORCEMENT

10. DEQ management is committed to enforcing environmental laws.

5% Strongly Agree 17% Agree 11% No Opinion 30% Disagree 37% Strongly Disagree

11. Compliance/enforcement efforts are given higher priority under DEQ than they were prior to the DNR split.

1% Strongly Agree 6% Agree 15% No Opinion 40% Disagree 38% Strongly Disagree

12. I have been directed by a superior to ignore an environmental rule or regulation.

14% Strongly Agree 12% Agree 28% No Opinion 29% Disagree 19% Strongly Disagree

13. Under the guise of "regulatory reform" Director Harding has ordered staff to take actions (e.g., reinterpret statutory requirements) that have resulted in less environmental protection.

25% Strongly Agree 36% Agree 20% No Opinion 8% Disagree 9% Strongly Disagree

14. I fear the possibility of job-related retaliation for advocating enforcement of environmental rules and regulations.

22% Strongly Agree 30% Agree 23% No Opinion 20% Disagree 5% Strongly Disagree

ACCOUNTABILITY

15. The DEQ disseminates complete and accurate agency information to the general public.

4% Strongly Agree 25% Agree 16% No Opinion 33% Disagree 22% Strongly Disagree

16. Ordinary citizens have as much access to and influence with DEQ decision-makers as representatives of the business community.

2% Strongly Agree 11% Agree 8% No Opinion 36% Disagree 43% Strongly Disagree

17. A citizen advisory board — similar to the Natural Resources Commission — should be established to oversee DEQ policy.

48% Strongly Agree 25% Agree 11% No Opinion 10% Disagree 6% Strongly Disagree

18. The DEQ and DNR should be re-combined into one agency.

38% Strongly Agree 23% Agree 19% No Opinion 13% Disagree 7% Strongly Disagree

LEADERSHIP

19. Director Harding's cross divisional movement weakens the agency by placing individuals into supervisory level positions for which they have no practical experience or expertise.

35% Strongly Agree 28% Agree 14% No Opinion 16% Disagree 7% Strongly Disagree

20. I have experienced or know of a situation(s) in which DEQ management has re-assigned or changed the job responsibility of a staffer for doing their job "too well" on a controversial project.

34% Strongly Agree 20% Agree 24% No Opinion 13% Disagree 9% Strongly Disagree

21. I trust top management of DEQ to protect Michigan's natural resources and public health.
5% Strongly Agree 12% Agree 2% No Opinion 22% Disagree 59% Strongly Disagree

22. Russell Harding has done a good job as DEQ Director in protecting the state's natural resources.
3% Strongly Agree 5% Agree 7% No Opinion 30% Disagree 55% Strongly Disagree

23. Morale among DEQ employees is:
1% Excellent 8% Good 17% Fair 32% Poor 42% Extremely Poor

24. In my opinion, the biggest problem facing the DEQ is: [SEE "[Employees Speak Out](#)"]

My current position at DEQ is:

12% Management / Supervisory 82% Non-Supervisory 6% Secretarial / Clerical

I work primarily in the following area(s):

39% Regulatory / Permitting 29% Compliance / Enforcement 23% Administration / Technical Services <>Office of the Director [1 person] 9% Other

1998 PEER Survey of Michigan's Department of Environmental Quality

EMPLOYEES SPEAK OUT!

Responses to the Question:

"In my opinion, the biggest problem facing the DEQ is..."

WHAT AGENCY LEADERSHIP*SAYS

**These individuals indicated that they hold management/supervisory positions at DEQ.*

"Loss of the mission of environmental advocacy and leadership."

"No incentive not to pollute."

"The lack of enforcement of environmental laws."

"Inadequate enforcement of laws -- insufficient staff to do appropriate number of inspection; anti-enforcement mentality in Executive Office; insufficient number of attorneys to fully prosecute all deserving cases."

"The pattern of substituting political agendas for professional scientific evaluation. This is best evidenced by the Office of Administrative Hearings, which has constantly reinterpreted wetland laws in

favor of those wishing to dredge, fill, drain or otherwise destroy wetlands for profit and overruling professional staff's evaluation and interpretation of clear law. This Office works directly under Director Harding's control and he works directly under the Governor's control, therefore reflecting their policies."

"Employees of the DEQ do not trust top management of the DEQ to protect Michigan's natural resources and environment. This agency was created by a pro-business governor by executive order. The person appointed by the Governor to run the new agency was widely despised within the DNR and the environmental community. A natural resource protection agency created in this way and run by pro-business political appointees will never gain the trust of employees that have dedicated their lives and careers to protecting natural resources and the environment."

"The impression created by the executive office that customer service is more important than protecting the environment."

"Until such time that employees can admire, trust and respect DEQ top management, the agency will never achieve the goals of protecting Michigan's environment. Unfortunately, that is exactly how the Governor and Director want it. The day the DNR was split (and I became a DEQ employee) was one of the saddest days of my career. I was always proud to say I worked for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. I take no pride in saying that I work for the DEQ, in fact I am ashamed of it."

"The blatant politicization of the Department. There is no public oversight of the Department. The public hearings are a dog and pony show -- basically a joke. Department management could care less about what the average citizen thinks. The Director is a political pawn who does exactly what the Governor wants."

"Director Harding has been picked by the Governor to cater to the Regulated Community. Wasting resources on customer service training and programs like Environmental Assistance Division. The Director hand picking industry friendly Division Chiefs. Division Heads ignoring technical staff to favor industry."

"Lack of a director and his immediate assistants that are dedicated to resource protection."

"Arrogant Division Chiefs and Directors who go along with Department decisions that violate laws. Succumbing to political influence even though the technical evaluations point to the opposite preferred action."

"Governor Engler, whose lackey Harding is Michigan's own James Watt. They have reduced Michigan's standing in the top five states nationally for environmental progressiveness to the dregs at the bottom of the barrel."

"If the general public knew what the Engler Administration is up to in state government they would be appalled. The public is constantly lied to and is a second class citizen to the business community."

"This agency is nothing more than a political machine, run by the Governor through his hired thugs."

BUSINESS INFLUENCE

"Our number one priority is providing our customer with good service. How can we get them their permits faster and friendlier? Protection of the environment is sacrificed for greater efficiency and productivity; we are here to serve the business community, not protect the resource."

"Political Interference, jobs commission, business entities, etc. Too many resources going to assist the regulated community at the expense of protecting the environment. The essence of our mission statement is 'helping to foster a strong and sustainable economy.'"

"The regulated community is able to schedule meetings on short notice with the governor, director and/or division chief. District staff involved with the issue are not invited to attend and are not asked for briefings. The regulated community always gets what they want, at the expense of the environment and public health while the DEQ staff morale and trust goes down the toilet."

"Although I consider myself a moderate, I see where the focus has been more on the economy than on the environment. We need to keep businesses running and people working, but we as an agency need to assure there are resources, usable resources, still available to future generations."

"Engler, Engler, Engler!"

"There's been a lack of an overall vision for the department, dating back to when we were still in the DNR, since Governor Engler took office. Or, even worse, a deliberate shift away from protecting the environment towards being primarily concerned with making money for businesses."

"Governor Engler is the problem. He puts his cronies into decision making positions who are yes people. His only concern is to help people or businesses who pad his pockets."

"Governor John Engler and Big Business! Vote the scum out NOW!"

"The ability of state legislative representatives (and the governor) to influence regulatory decisions."

"There is no commission to represent the public interests, and allow for open discussion of executive decisions, environmental problems, and policy making. The organization represents the large corporate community. Russ Harding is only accountable to the Governor, who believes that environmental rules and regulations are detrimental to the interests of industry."

"I have seen a Division Chief removed from his position because he was a strong environmentalist and certain industry reps didn't like him. The Director's Office has had secret meetings with industry and granted them illegal permits and immunity from enforcement. Regulations do not get passed by the Governor's Office unless they relax requirements for industry or provide the 'minimum' required to meet the federal Act and get federal monies."

"Lack of willingness to enforce violation of environmental regulations; and using public money to fund environmental work (cleanups) that should be paid for by viable companies. DEQ has a political agenda"

driven by the governor's office which does not have the state's natural resources as the top priority over the big business community."

"The biggest problem facing the DEQ will be preserving, protecting, and enhancing the outstanding natural resources of this state, while focusing on the economic benefit of our 'customers' -- the regulated community. No focus or foresight is factored into our decisions. Consequently, we are ignoring the long-term intangible benefits that we and our children and our children's children can witness and experience through the wise use, preservation, and enhancement of the beautiful natural resources of Michigan."

"Focus on economic development at expense of natural resources. Management that fosters economic growth and ignores strengthening protection and enforcement programs by cutting staff, and weakening staff efforts through a variety of unnoticed tactics."

"Working in the DEQ is barely tolerable. Those who haven't left state service already are just trying to hang in there until we get a new Governor and a new Director. Governor Engler and Harding are destroying state government, the environment and the natural resources. Thank you for taking this survey, and I hope the people of Michigan find out what's really going on in our state."

LAX ENFORCEMENT

"Lack of enforcement. Savvy 'regulated' parties violate laws with the knowledge that the odds are in their favor. It truly is easier to ask forgiveness rather than permission. Chances of restoration being required are very low -- no penalty."

"Having good environmental enforcement cases delayed until they exceed their statute of limitations...there is very little incentive to pursue any actions against companies on industrial entities for violations."

"Lack of enforcement. No citizen oversight. Scientific (not technically supported) fraud -- "bad science." (Science does not = political science!) Lack of awareness to public at large of what is going on -- how DEQ is totally emasculated."

"Emphasis on issuing permits for bean counting purposes with little consideration to sound science. Total lack of enforcement."

"Laws lack enough 'teeth'. Need much more enforcement power. Need the extra attorneys and judges to move these cases quickly. Need enforcement power over agriculture who are exempt or not covered by environmental laws."

"Allowing big businesses to either name the enforcement action or to downgrade the limitations of the originally passed Act to suit their own needs by the governor's recommendation. Lack of Enforcement Officers within DEQ to regulate the Act (one officer for an 11 county area)."

"Very little criminal enforcement. Very difficult for staff to get criminal investigators to investigate!"

"I have not done any enforcement action since 1996."

"No enforcement."

"Department and Division Management have made enforcement a joke, not through direct orders but by not supporting enforcement efforts with adequate staff and budgets and by consistently and aggressively enforcing the environmental laws. Staff knows that they're safe if they don't make any critical decisions. Consequently, employee morale is at an all-time low."

"This survey addresses economic influences on the department however an often larger influence is the judicial system where we often lose cases which would have been won in years past. Influence of non-scientific concerns and lack of enforcement are the biggest problems."

"DEQ Division's reinterpreting statutory language based on administrative law judge decisions, in lieu of case law that proves we should interpret otherwise. ALJ Decisions poor and pro-development!"

"Administrative law judges choosing to ignore sound environmental science and base their decisions upon their own agenda or the agenda of the Engler Administration, possibly fearing job-related retaliation as well."

"Lack of enforcement and proper funding; separation of Resource Managers (DNR) from Protectors (DEQ); and inappropriate decisions/contrary to law routinely being made by DEQ Administrative Law Judges."

POOR LEADERSHIP

"Poor upper management (Director's Office) and their inability or lack of desire to utilize knowledgeable staff. The DEQ has adequate staff and expertise to perform their mission, but poor leadership and resulting low employee morale which inhibit the process."

"Leaders who care more about the economy than the environment."

"Russell Harding and John Engler."

"John Engler/Russell Harding -- they have to go!! We must protect the environment, not help big business get out of the mess they have created."

"Four more years of Governor Engler influencing the Department. Keeping Harding as Director. There's no doubt that he listens more to non-environmental groups (e.g. business) than he does to his own staff. If we were an army, I feel like our Generals are for the other side!"

"John Engler and Russell Harding. Their first concern is promoting business and industry."

"John Engler! And his puppet Russ Harding."

"The person sitting in the Governor's chair."

"Fuhrer Harding. If he ever shakes your hand, be sure afterwards to count your fingers and wash off the slime."

"The director -- who seems to have little concern for the importance of natural resources and how they benefit all of us. The division chiefs seem like they have strong environmental beliefs, but cannot act on them due to orders from the top."

"Lack of support by Governor, Director for DEQ/DNR, and for State employees in general."

"Too many unqualified Supervisors, appointed as 'favors', trying to run things. Too many upper management turning their heads (ignoring) problems brought to their attention."

"Now that the DEQ bureaucracy is in place and staffed by a hierarchy of policy administrators, it will be next to impossible to change much, given four more years of the Engler/Harding regime. Maintaining dedication and morale is the main challenge for field workers."

"It is difficult to decide if the biggest problem is the governor or the director. Stakeholder groups are heavily weighted in favor of those being regulated and some of the environmental groups have refused to attend because their voice is drowned out by industry. The stakeholder groups also seem to be listened to by management more so than our own staff. Also, privatization of our work puts the bottom line on profits instead of the environment."

"That top management is too influenced by political influence, considerations, and/or connections. Middle and lower levels of the agency I believe are in general, dedicated to serving the welfare of the general public and natural resource. Top management needs to be accountable to a citizen board and not only to the Governor."

"Overcoming political pressure and influence of John Engler or any future governor since virtually all top management appointments are either made directly or indirectly by the Governor's Office. The Governor's reorganizations have eliminated commissions that were designed to insulate the Department's policy from such direct political influence."

"Russell Harding, Chad McIntosh, Gary Hughes -- Engler's industry lackeys running the DEQ."

"Upper level management are in the hip pocket of the governor and he would sell out anything to serve his constituents, who are the regulated community and wealthy people. Harding/Hughes/ McIntosh are there to make life easy for the regulated community and nothing else."

"Poor managers. Few good role models. Reduced staff pushed to do more work. Experienced and professional licensed staff are leaving. Remaining workers are doing more and more superficial reviews and studies."

STAFFING/FUNDING

"Lack of staff to do the job adequately or well, due to a governor who doesn't want to DEQ to do their job." "Too few staff and too little money to get the job done."

"Too few staff and too little money to get the job done."

"Employee morale due to hiring freezes, resulting in workloads on individual employees, which are unmanageable. However, the employee is still accountable for the work. Cannot dedicate enough time to projects to do a good job on them even with the best intentions."

"Lack of resources, particularly number of staff. That is absolutely the reason why morale is low -- people are too overburdened to fight top management over controversies. I think the will is there (to fight for mandated protection) at the lower levels. Cutting staff reduces credibility of agency to public and permittees, making it easier to cut even more and to override low-level decisions. Burnout hurts DEQ as much or more than Englers' administration's maneuvering on cases."

"A greater reliance on regulations, policies and procedures is not a good substitute for competent staff and management and more publically assessable forums (Commissions, Boards, etc.) I have seen both excessively restrictive and less than adequate actions taken on behalf of environmental protection. With the loss of environmentally competent staff, what can we expect for the future of the DEQ and environmental protection?"

"Not enough staff and field workers, too much political influence. Clean up not adequate and pollution resolution not timely. Our water bodies continue to be polluted."

NEGATIVE COMMENTS ABOUT PEER

"Extremist negative surveys such as this. The tone of this survey offends my professional standards. Trying to some customers as 'primary' which implies others are 'secondary' is contradictory of equal protection concerns which are guaranteed by both state and federal constitutions." -DEQ Manager

"Negative attitudes by employees towards top management. Our agency is run by political appointees now...get used to it and do your best to do your job. Quit whining and start working! There's lots of good to be done!" -DEQ Manager

"It must be nice to be political whores which are the puppets of the Democratic party." -DEQ Manager

"The Department is comprised primarily of field staff who long for a return to the 'good old days' of the 1980s when the eco-terrorists ran unchecked using their intimidation and 'gestapo'-like tactics. The changes of the last 4-5 years were long overdue. These 'malcontents' need to be weeded out of state government."