For tribal air staff, the work goes on—setting up and maintaining monitors, performing air quality inspections, tending to paperwork and crunching data, educating the community and meeting with various groups. Most of that work flies under the radar of public awareness, and few on the “outside” can really appreciate the effort and expertise that tribal air staff bring to their profession. Such awareness could serve as a powerful tool for garnering support and funding from outside agencies, and knowledge of what one’s colleagues are doing encourages solidarity and a sense of common purpose. But the low-key nature of the work can make it tough to get the message out.

Five years ago, Brandy Toft, Air Quality Specialist with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Indians, decided to change that. The result is a unique document, titled “The Region 5 Tribal Air Resources Journal.” The journal is a compendium of reports by tribes within EPA Region 5 (comprising Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin) on the state of their air quality, the challenges they face, and the support they need to better protect their communities.

Until last year Toft produced the journal in partnership with Air Quality Specialist Jeremy Howe, who recently stepped away from his role with the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians. Faced with continuing the project solo, Toft didn’t miss a beat. “It’s extremely important,” she says. “I know the value of it, as information, as a promotional tool, and I know that many others value it.”

Another group of university students has been selected for ITEP’s 2014 Summer Internship program and will soon join their host sites for some up-close experience in the real-world of environmental management.

Since 1994, ITEP has offered internships with funding from U. S. EPA. This program provides the opportunity for students to gain hands-on skills with EPA or other governmental, non-profit, or tribal environmental offices. Thanks to additional funding from the National Tribal Air Association, ITEP is offering additional internships this year for internships focusing on tribal air quality policy. Some
Greetings. The 2014 National Tribal Forum is fast approaching and ITEP, the National Tribal Air Association and U.S. EPA are all working hard to make this year’s event the best ever.

The NTF will take place May 13–15 at the Swinomish Casino and Lodge in Washington state. As always, the Forum will bring together a lively mix of seasoned air staff, newcomers, federal and state officials, and representatives of environmental organizations. Together we’ll explore air quality tools, techniques and trends, the latest developments on the regulatory front, climate-change information and responses, and many other topics. The NTF also offers you a unique opportunity to hear from, and speak directly with, tribal leaders and federal officials who deal with air issues. The strength of the forum is in you, the participants, and networking is a crucial part of the NTF experience.

Four tracks will shape this year’s forum, addressing ambient air, indoor air, climate change, and federal regulatory issues. The Virgil Masayesva Tribal Air Programs Excellence Award will also be presented to an individual or program notable in advancing the cause of air quality protection on tribal lands.

A big part of the NTF focus will be on climate. On that note, I first want to offer my congratulations to Sue Wotkyns, Program Manager for ITEP’s Tribes and Climate Change program. Sue was recently confirmed by Secretary of the Interior, Sally Jewell, as my Alternate for the Advisory Committee on Climate Change and Natural Resources Science (ACCCNRS). The 25-member ACCCNRS is an official federal advisory group formed to offer guidance to Secretary Jewell on the Interior Department’s climate science activities. The ACCCNRS is making some incredible progress on behalf of tribes. In our first meetings, fellow ACCCNRS member Dr. Gary Morishima (from the Quinault Nation) and I presented on tribal climate challenges. A workgroup, “Tribes and Indigenous Matters,” was formed as a result and has since developed three proposals for the general body to consider relaying to the Secretary.

First, we have drafted a primer on climate change and tribes, recounting the history of tribal climate issues and defining those challenges. Next, we worked with a national subgroup to develop a document that provides information on the nature and value of Traditional Knowledges (TKs) and guidelines for their utilization in climate science. The document is intended for use by indigenous peoples, federal agencies, and researchers. For example, if a grant is submitted to a Climate Science Center (CSC) which involves TKs, both proponents and reviewers can draw on the document to gain a better understanding of issues that need to be addressed.

Lastly, our work group is assisting the facilitation of the ACCCNRS to meet with tribal leaders to develop ways to promote substantive tribal engagement in federal climate initiatives. We are hoping to collaborate with the two tribal representatives on the President’s Climate Change Task Force to develop complementary recommendations for consideration by the Task Force and the ACCCNRS.

See DIRECTOR on page 6
ITEP and the National Tribal Air Association invite you to join us for this year’s National Tribal Forum, a gathering of tribal air staff, federal and state officials, nonprofit organizations, and air-industry representatives. The NTF provides a unique opportunity for you to learn new skills; meet old friends and colleagues and make new ones; share ideas, resources, and concerns; and speak directly with tribal leaders and federal officials. Don’t miss this once-a-year opportunity for professional growth—and fun.

To register, or for more information, visit the ITEP website at: [www4.nau.edu/itep/conferences/confr_ntf.asp](http://www4.nau.edu/itep/conferences/confr_ntf.asp)
Under the coordination of Toft and Howe—and through Toft’s efforts alone in 2013—the journal has thrived since its launch in 2009. The number of tribes participating in the journal has grown each year, as has the quality and depth of their reports.

Only 13 of the region’s 35 tribes presently have formal, EPA-funded air programs, but that hasn’t discouraged the majority of tribes in the region from taking part. Toft published 28 reports last year—and she notes that two additional tribes sent material that arrived too late to publish. “Every year it grows,” she says. “My goal is to get all 35 tribes involved.” Few who know Toft would question that she’ll eventually meet that goal.

Recognizing the time demands most tribal air staffers face, and as a gesture of respect for tribal sovereignty, Toft seeks to ease the reporting process as much as possible. She maintains a hands-off approach, setting few editorial rules for each report. “It has to be on air quality,” she says, “it’s limited to a page, and if a tribe includes a picture, it needs a caption. That’s pretty much it. This is the tribes’ document, not mine. I’m just the compiler. I usually don’t even call back to ask for more [information]; it’s whatever each tribe wants to put in there. I do a few edits, mostly just making sure abbreviations and acronyms are consistent throughout the document.”

The brevity of each write-up makes the process easier for both authors and readers. With the aid of a standard template, tribal air staff write the reports and Toft assembles them into a document that is readable and easy to navigate. The journal opens with a region-wide “Summary of Facts” on the Clean Air Act status of reporting tribes, and meetings, committees and workgroups in which tribal air staff have participated—a concise overview that has drawn praise from across the tribal air community. Contact information is provided for each Region 5 tribe, and abbreviations and acronyms occupy a page, helping readers wade through the sometimes murky waters of techspeak. The actual reports follow a standard structure that provides a quick concise look at the air-quality status of any participating tribe in the region.

**Gentle Tenacity**

Toft strongly believes in the value of the document and strives each year to keep the enthusiasm of participants high. “I call every tribe in Region 5,” she says, “I send out emails, templates. When I do catch someone in the office or if they call back, we generally have a 20- or 30-minute conversation. [Some tribal staff] who don’t have established EPA-funded air programs say, “That’s Jeremy Howe, formerly with the environmental department at the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, helped launch the R5 Tribal Air Journal in 2009.

One thing that shocked me when I did the funding page this time was that I wasn’t adding any new items, I was deleting items. That was because of the federal budget, the sequestration. It was eye-opening.”

–Brandy Toft

The 2013 report included a new component: a map, created by Toft’s colleague Ryan Anderson, that illustrates ceded territories in Region 5. Areas where tribes retain reserved rights after ceding land to the United States government are depicted in color and marked by dates indicating when the relevant treaty was signed. Toft explains: “Sometimes those rights are not always identified or defined in the EPA system. So this map is a color representation for people to pay attention to. And looking at the map, you can see there’s a lot of color.”
Toft received the Virgil Masayesva Environmental Excellence Award in 2012 for her outstanding work on behalf of tribes.

“Brandy is a proactive and effective advocate for Region 5 tribes. The Region 5 Tribal Air Journal is a wonderful compilation of the activities and accomplishments of the tribes throughout the region, and provides a great record of their work and priorities over the years. Brandy not only serves the Region 5 tribes well but all tribes as the vice chair of the National Tribal Air Association. She is also a deserving past recipient of the Virgil Masayesva Tribal Air Programs Excellence Award.”


For more information on the Region 5 Tribal Air Journal, contact Brandy Toft at: air@lldrm.org
**DIRECTOR – from page 2**

We are undertaking outreach efforts to help inform the tribal community of efforts by the ACCCNRS and opportunities to provide comments and recommendations. The first meeting will be held at the National Tribal Forum, where a Climate Change Town Hall will be held. The NTF is an appropriate launch pad for this effort, as our host, the Swinomish Tribe, is a national leader in responding to climate change. Future meetings we are working to arrange include the 2014 National Congress of American Indians mid-year session in Alaska, and the First Stewards Symposium in July in Washington DC. I am pleased with the momentum of this effort and the promise it offers of generating actionable plans to assist tribes in their struggle with climate-change impacts.

Switching gears, I wanted to introduce the Navajo Nation Workforce Development program, which ITEP’s Roberta Tohannie oversees. Roberta has made great progress in generating a large pool of Diné applicants to be trained in environmental remediation skills, the program’s focus. This effort will increase employment on the Nation while also addressing significant issues of uranium contamination on Navajo land. Interviews are complete, and we now have a roster of 20 trainees. Congratulations to Roberta on her great work with this program.

ITEP’s Online Professional Certificate Courses in “Water Management” and “Tribal Environmental Management” are now taking enrollment and will begin in June—please check the ITEP website for more information. These courses are open to anyone with an internet connection and represent ITEP’s first step into global training! Jen Williams and Cristina Gonzalez-Maddux have done excellent work in developing these courses.

Finally, I have two announcements. First, ITEP is pleased to announce that we were selected to administer the Tribal Support for the National Environmental Information Exchange Network (NEIEN) cooperative agreement from EPA’s Office of Environmental Information. The goal of the cooperative agreement is to enhance tribal participation in the NEIEN, which itself strives to support better environmental decisions through improved exchange of, and access to, environmental information. We welcome the input and involvement of all tribes, not just those currently involved in NEIEN projects. Lydia Scheer will be managing the project.

Second, at this year’s National Tribal Forum ITEP will launch our Twitter feed, so tune in to your gadgets at NTF and anywhere else you happen to be for news on Forum activities and other noteworthy ITEP happenings. We look forward to engaging with all of you in real time.

As always, I invite you to keep in touch and to share your comments and concerns. Happy Spring 2014.

**INTERNS – from front page**

Repeat host sites this year have also requested additional interns—a tribute to the good work the students did last year.

ITEP’s 2013 interns enjoyed a variety of opportunities, including placement with Winona LaDuke’s Honor the Earth program in Minnesota, where a student, Autumn Harry, focused on energy-production issues, including impacts to the region’s water, air and climate. Another two interns, Chanbopha Sen and Michael Halgonnie, worked at regional EPA offices, where they got involved in implementation of the new Clean Air Act permitting program in Indian country (New Source Review). A total of nine students were placed last year; this year’s total is eleven.

We encourage all tribal environmental offices to consider setting aside funding for workforce development, including interns. Internships are a great way to provide experience and training for your future staff.

Each year's internship program offers students invaluable experience that helps them to see up-close the kinds of jobs that exist in the environmental field and prepare them for their future careers. Next year’s application process for 2015 EEOP interns will begin shortly. Due to a different funding cycle this year, the next round of internships will be scheduled in the coming winter and spring.

For more information, contact Mansel A Nelson at mansel.nelson@nau.edu, phone 928-523-1275.
Modern technology offers endless conveniences, bolstering food production, personal comfort, ease of travel, industrial production and countless other benefits. But progress has come at a cost: according to one study conducted by Mount Sinai School of Medicine researchers, tissues in the bodies of sampled U.S. residents contained traces of some 91 industrial compounds, pollutants and chemicals, totaling 167 substances. Of that total, 76 have been shown to cause cancer in humans and animals, 94 are linked to central nervous system damage, and 79 can cause birth defects or abnormal development.

The numbers are alarming, though the “body load” of these toxins in the average American tends to be minute, and clear links to illnesses at such concentrations have not (yet) been established. However, they clearly pose some degree of risk, and that risk is heightened for tribal members who draw on natural food sources like salmon and other species.

Addressing toxics-related health risks to Native people is the role of the National Tribal Toxics Council (NTTC), a volunteer group of tribal professionals who came together in 2012 to provide assistance to Native communities in their efforts to address this widespread threat to their health.

Supported by U.S. EPA’s Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics (OPPT)—and with logistical and research assistance since last November from ITEP—the 12-member Council meets regularly to learn more about toxics issues, determine which they’ll confront, and develop strategies that will have the greatest impact.

On the ITEP side, John Mead handles logistical and administrative support, including help in providing an interface between the Council and EPA. “The Council,” says Mead, “is really into outreach to tribes on policy issues, and they’re up to their eyeballs in issues of consultation, comments, making tribes aware of the issues. Right now we’re working with the OPPT staff to feel our way into how this process will work for both tribes and EPA.”

Jen Williams is the other half of ITEP’s support team. Her work includes providing research assistance to the Council and creating informational material that tribal leaders and environmental staff can use in the federal consultation and comment process, and as a basis for developing community-based responses to toxic threats.

**Passion and Expertise**

Dianne Barton presently chairs the NTTC. A member of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians in Wisconsin, she holds a doctorate in geochemistry and has worked, among other capacities, on environmental restoration and “massive-parallel-computing” at Sandia National Laboratory in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Barton now lives in Portland, Oregon, where she serves as Water Quality Coordinator with the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, providing technical assistance and promoting water quality management practices for four Pacific Northwest tribes with treaty fishing rights in the Columbia River watershed. Her work supports the group’s goal of encouraging U.S. EPA to tighten toxics regulations for substances that show up in the river’s salmon population—a concern that dovetails with the NTTC’s work.

She says of her fellow NTTC members, who represent tribes from around the country, “I’m continually amazed by the caliber of people on this council. We have staff who have worked in environmental positions for their tribes for years and have really good experience and knowledge.” She points to the volunteer hours these mostly full-time tribal staff members put into the Council’s work as evidence of their commitment and passion.

At the last in-person Council meeting, in Spokane last November, EPA officials who were scheduled to attend and present on toxics-related topics were unable to travel due to the federal shutdown. “So the members stood up,” Barton says, “and they gave talks on PCBs and risk assessment, and see TOXICS on page 8
they covered everything wonderfully. This is an extremely talented group of people who bring various perspectives and amazing expertise.

The Council’s expertise will be crucial as they grapple with two classes of toxics they’ve identified from the myriad of possibilities. The Council’s overriding goal is to support any toxics-related effort a particular tribe wants to tackle, but their broader mission is to influence the federal regulatory process on behalf of tribes. In that role, they’re now targeting two specific classes of toxics: polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs).

PCBs

Despite being banned for production in the U.S. since 1979, PCBs, which are tied to a wide range of health problems, are still found in the environment from desert lakes to Arctic snowfields—not to mention in the body tissues of most North Americans.

To read a factsheet on PCBs, visit www.epa.gov/osw/hazard/tsd/pcbs/pubs/effects.htm.

The U.S. ban in 1979 did much to reduce PCB levels in the environment, and body loads of these chemicals in humans have decreased significantly over the years. But the problem persists. That’s mostly due to “legacy products” containing PCBs that are already in and leakage from items containing the compounds, and because of a loophole in federal regulations that continues to allow their presence in commercially traded goods at levels up to 50 parts per million (ppm).

The 50 ppm rule was supposed to “sunset” in the mid-1980s. That still hasn’t happened, and though an end to the loophole was included in an early draft of a recently proposed update to PCB regulations, the provision disappeared from the final draft of the rule.

Barton says given this regulatory gap, it’s impossible to control the “influx of products containing the substance that come from overseas. They show up in paint, inks and dyes [PCB 11], capacitors, transformers. Much of the allowable usage is in “closed containers,’ but those can leak.” Contamination, she says, is pervasive, flowing from runoff out of developed areas, both urban and rural, and entering waterways, where it invades the tissues of fish in a manner similar to mercury pollution.

One problem with combatting the PCB threat is the federal regulatory timeframe. Once an issue is identified by U.S. EPA, extensive studies are required, and regulations, if enacted, can take five years or more to become law.

Educational outreach on the issue is a big part of the Council’s activities. ITEP has been providing the NTTC with informational materials for that purpose. But a strengthening of the federal PCB rule, Barton says, is the real answer. “In the early 1990s, EPA turned down the state of Oregon setting their fish consumption rate, which is a variable in the water-quality standards, to better reflect tribal consumption patterns.”

More recently, even as Oregon has partnered with tribes to develop the nation’s strongest state PCB regulation, and as Washington follows closely in Oregon’s wake, a federal rule, says Barton, is the only truly effective way to eliminate the problem at its source. “All EPA has to do,” she says, “is recognize there’s a problem and push for legislation, and that impacts every water permit in the country. That’s the way to do it. It’s a hard process, but we need change on the national level.”

The NTTC engaged in outreach with tribes regarding the present federal effort to update the PCB rule (the period for tribal input has ended. In Winter 2014–15, public review will commence). Their efforts have been notably successful: Numerous comments were submitted by tribes, and the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians passed a resolution urging EPA to take action on uncontained PCBs in the environment.

To read the ATNI’s resolution, visit: www.ecy.wa.gov/toxics/docs/fish_affiliatedtribes_resolution.pdf.

“We’re just saying that if EPA would set limits,” Barton says, “this would force industries that are selling [PCB-laden] products in the U.S. to stop it. Thirty years later, it’s finally time to do something about that.”

Barton says ITEP, which stepped into the management and support role as the PCB campaign was underway, “worked very quickly on this and were extremely helpful in getting so many tribes onto the December consultation on PCBs.” Part of the PCB outreach was accomplished via the

See TOXICS on page 9
NTTC’s website, developed by ITEP to support the Council’s work, relay information to tribes, and provide an access point through which concerned individuals can contact Council members and members of the regulatory community. “It’s one more avenue for getting information out,” she says. ITEP is also coordinating informational webinars, one of which was presented to tribal participants in January.

PBDEs
Unlike PCBs, now banned for production in the U.S., polybrominated diphenyl ethers—an endocrine-disrupting class of chemicals that bio-accumulates in the foodchain—continue to be produced in this country for use as flame retardants. PBDE compounds are added to electrical equipment, clothing, furniture and construction materials and are used in fire-fighting applications that include spray foams and protective gear.

To read an EPA factsheet on PBDEs and similar chemicals, visit: www.epa.gov/fedfac/pdf/technical_fact_sheet_pbde_pbb.pdf.

Although PBDEs are broadly perceived to resist fire, scientists and activists debate the efficacy of these compounds and decry the intensive lobbying by industry interests that some say exaggerate the compounds’ efficacy. In a Chicago Tribune series, for example, Dale Ray, a top official with the Consumer Product Safety Commission, summarized a test in which couches with and without flame retardant treatment were burned. “We did not find flame retardants in foam to provide any significant protection,” Ray said of the test.

To read the Chicago Tribune series on toxics, visit: http://media.apps.chicagotribune.com/flames/index.html.

Efficacy arguments aside, Barton insists, “I’m not against flame retardants, but they shouldn’t be in your kids’ clothes or the environment you’re sitting in.” While PCB levels have decreased in the tissues of North American humans and wildlife, PCDE levels continue to rise in human tissues and in various wildlife species, including salmon consumed by members of Northwestern tribes. The compounds are so pervasive in our society that there’s no way to pinpoint where the contamination originates. “It isn’t just metro areas that are contributing to this,” Barton says. “It’s ubiquitous in the environment.”

The Council is working hard on the PCDE issue, and Barton says her hope is that within the year a new regulatory effort will take shape on the federal level to address risks associated with this pervasive substance.

The Bigger Picture
Whether the issue is PCBs, flame retardants or other toxic risks to tribal communities, education is key. ITEP's Jen Williams says one challenge for tribes—and anyone else who wants to understand the issues and develop meaningful responses—lies in the complexity of the language of toxics. “It’s my goal,” she says, “to take all the lingo and put it into laypersons’ language all of us can understand. It’s so important that we can talk to each other, to our community, our kids, about these issues.”

Good information is becoming more readily available from federal and other agencies, she says. But so many toxins are present in our environment these days that it’s difficult to get a handle on the most significant and immediate threats. “EPA is developing tools for this, and they’re getting better at it. But, for example, you see a regulation that says, ‘PCB Use Authorization.’ Well, what does that mean? It means people are still using PCBs in their light ballasts and their transformers. What are those? Who authorizes this? What for? How does this impact my kids? So, our first couple of fact sheets [which have already gone out to tribes] were on policy and on describing Use Authorization—putting it in language anyone can understand.”

Williams notes that tribes who wish to combat toxic threats directly are limited in terms of federal support. For example, as Barton notes from OPPT provides support for pollution prevention initiatives, grantees must provide a 50% match—an onerous barrier for most tribes.

The lack of support for tribal prevention and education programs, Barton believes, is a fundamental drawback, one that the NTTC is working to address. “In the world of toxics,” she says, “prevention is so much cheaper, better, more effective, than trying to pick all these molecules of flame retardant or PCBs out of the environment. If a tribe has a way to stop the impacts on their watershed, it’s so much better. Advocating for more equitable arrangements, for tribal set-asides for tribal pollution prevention that don’t require that kind of match, that would be very helpful.”

Barton says the Council’s overriding goal is to help bend federal policies in a more tribal-friendly direction. “We need to have very effective, policy-level consultations, where tribal leaders are not talking about a rule once it’s in place, and commenting on it—which is how the PCB process went—but having real influence up-front on the policy choices that EPA makes.”

To learn more about the NTTC, visit: www.tribaltoxics.org