

Perspective: Rediscovering the Importance of Regulatory Oversight through Personal Experiences of Environmental Disasters in a Caribbean Neighbor

Presenter(s)

Sean Whalen and Bill Diesslin
Iowa State University Department of Environmental Health and Safety

Abstract Text

Have you hugged your regulator today?

Next time the EPA shows up in your office at 9 am on a Tuesday morning surprise them with a generous handshake, a hearty slap on the back, a cup of coffee, and maybe a nice slice of pie. During the exit interview, after they are done tallying up the NOV's, send them on their way with a quick hug and a sincere THANK YOU! for a job well done.

That's the attitude Bill and Sean are adopting after providing environmental out-reach to the Commonwealth of the Bahamas. During 2006 and 2007, Iowa State University EH&S, in partnership with a Bahamian Environmental Engineering firm, conducted environmental, safety and health training for Bahamian Department of Environmental Health Services (DEHS) employees tasked with landfill operations and hazardous waste management. Environmental regulation is in its infancy in the Bahamas; there is at present no requirement that hazardous waste chemicals be managed as we have come to understand management here in the U.S. The Bahamian government is attempting to educate personnel and residents regarding environmental issues, but minimal grassroots advocacy, coupled with internal bureaucracy and the lack of a strong regulatory base, slow the pace of improvement. Environmentally, the Bahamas mirror the United States of the 1950s and 1960s.

Bill and Sean traveled to the Bahamas as part of the out-reach process. During our visits we documented several disturbing on-going and potential environmental disasters, including ground, surface and ocean water contamination, air pollution, and unsafe solid and hazardous waste management. Each return to the States reinforced the importance of our environmental regulations, which we often perceive as burdensome, and provided an appreciation of how far we have come in environmental protection in the past 30 years. Our goal is to positively adjust the perspectives of our peers with our sobering, yet entertaining and informative presentation.



Bill and Sean stand in front of the burning Harrold Road Landfill, New Providence Island, Commonwealth of the Bahamas, May 2006

Presenter Bio(s)

Sean Whalen, CHMM, Environmental Programs Manager, Iowa State University
20+ years experience, BS and MA from Iowa State University

Bill Diesslin, CSP, CHMM, Associate Director, Iowa State University
20+ years experience, BS Winona State, MS Iowa State University