

Earth Day 2012



Career Profile

Name: June A. Black
Job Title: Organic Chemistry Section Chief
Location: Bureau of Laboratories
Years with DEP: 13

What kinds of activities do you perform on a daily basis?

I manage a staff of 11 organic chemists performing testing in support of DEP programs and regulations. I also review data and perform analyses as necessary during times of heavy sample load. In addition, I provide technical support to field staff and contractors who have questions regarding proper testing and sample collection procedures. I serve on the Fish Consumption Advisory Technical Workgroup, which is an interdepartmental group responsible for reviewing fish tissue data and setting consumption advisory limits for native caught fish from Pennsylvania waters.

What kind of educational background do you have?

I have a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Mount Holyoke College.

What is the most challenging part of your job?

In recent years, the workload has been the most difficult aspect. When I first joined the Bureau of Laboratories, there were about 105 employees, now we have 80. The number of samples being submitted to the Organic Chemistry Section annually has doubled during that same time frame. Plus, the Bureau has achieved national accreditation status, which significantly increases the number and types of quality assurance and quality control measures being performed by the laboratory.

What got you interested in working in an environmental field?

When I graduated from college, the first job I got was working for an environmental testing lab. I hadn't particularly given any thought to working in the environmental field before that, but once I was there I found I liked it. Protection of the environment has always been important to me, so it was nice to feel like I was "doing my part".

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

Sometimes chemists get a bad rap for damaging, polluting or otherwise not caring about the environment. I really enjoy working for the Bureau because it allows me to practice the science I love while feeling that I am helping to protect the environment and public health. It is the best of both worlds!

What advice do you have for someone thinking about a career in environmental science?

Try to understand as many different aspects of the job as possible. There are many state and federal environmental statutes which affect both the collection and testing of samples. It seems that field staff are familiar with the regulations concerning (for example) site cleanup standards, but not the applicability of the various analytical methodologies available for use – and the opposite is also true.