

Earth Day 2012



Career Profile

Name: Stephan Brown
Job Title: Radiation Health Physicist I
Location: Southeastern Regional Office
Years with DEP: 20

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

I inspect the safe use of radioactive materials at all types of medical and industrial facilities in Southeast and Northeast Regions. I am also a major contributor to the region's emergency response. In that capacity, and in my previous position in the storage tanks program, I have been the on-scene technical coordinator oils spills, hazardous material releases, and multiple other environmental emergencies that occur at all hours of the day and night, on weekdays and on weekends. I have also trained multiple employees in these areas.

In addition to my work at DEP, I work for the U.S. Coast Guard – Atlantic Strike Team to the national response to the environmental resulting from Hurricane Katrina and Deepwater Horizon (BP spill in the Gulf of Mexico).

What kind of educational background do you have?

I have a bachelor's degree in chemistry with a minor political science from the University of Pittsburgh. I also have certificates in emergency management and homeland security from Delaware County Community College.

What is the most challenging part of your job?

It can be difficult to achieve a work-life balance while contributing to DEP's radiation protection and emergency response programs and meeting my commitment to the U.S. Coast Guard.

What got you interested in working in an environmental field?

Although it is not possible to "save the world" while working for the DEP, it is possible to improve the environment by doing the best job possible wherever assigned.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

It is rewarding to see our work make a real difference is being made in the environment and in peoples' lives.

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

Always do your homework first and find the area that you most enjoy and where you can do the most good.

From Stephan's Supervisor (June 2010): *Stephan Brown is working in the Gulf of Mexico this week instead of DEP's Southeast Regional Office in Norristown. He's been there since May 15, assigned to the U.S. Coast Guard's in-situ burn group operating out of Venice, LA, and working five miles from the BP oil spill site.*

When he's in Norristown, Brown works in the regional Radiation Protection program and is a trained emergency responder, but when he's on military leave from the department, he's Petty Officer 1st Class Brown, a marine science technician, who is currently deployed for 60 days to respond to the nation's worst environmental catastrophe.

Living and working at sea on the M/V Premier Explorer, Brown is a safety coordinator assigned to a fleet of Coast Guard and private vessels that tow booms to collect and then burn the oil that is floating on the surface of the Gulf. He's also training contract employees and Coast Guard personnel to conduct air monitoring from the diving vessel.

Brown's career with the department has prepared him for environmental disasters. For 16 of the 18 years that he's been with DEP, he's been part of the region's Emergency Response Team, and was among its members who worked on the 2004 Athos I oil spill on the Delaware River.

He's had almost two decades of experiencing what petroleum products can do when they leak into groundwater or spill into surface water. Prior to joining the radiation protection group, Brown worked in the storage tanks section of the region's Environmental Cleanup Program. During a three-week Coast Guard deployment in 2005, he was in Plaquemines Parrish, Louisiana, dealing with oil releases caused by Hurricane Katrina.

This is the first time, however, that the Philadelphia resident has been part of a response team that has used controlled burns to address a spill. E-mailing his DEP co-workers from aboard ship, he reports that the fleet is working long days and late into the night, burning off oil to keep it from reaching the fragile wetlands along the coast. His co-workers appreciate the magnitude of the task, and look forward to his safe return.