

Survey of Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection Northeastern Region (NERO) Employees October 2003

With the assistance of New England PEER, Northeastern Region Employees (NERO) developed this survey. The purpose of this survey was to allow the professionals within the department to express their views concerning the direction of the agency. Responses were organized according to the topic areas in which they fell; respondents were not asked to specifically address these topic areas, however the overlap in response topics was considerable. Due to the need to maintain confidentiality specific employee names are not included in the transcription.

What single thing do you feel would best improve the operations of DEP?

Regional Office Location

“You simply cannot operate field operations from the Boston office. We need our steel-toe boots, hard hats, glow vests, sampling equip. & cameras, etc. to do our job. We cannot hump this equip. around, even if our cars were parked “just 10-min. walk” it is not tolerable...Sure I love being in the middle of the shopping district in Boston but my job is compliance & enforcement and it is out in the field!”

“Probably the single thing that would most improve operations would be locate the office in an area that is toward the center of the region, given the traveling time to get to regulated destination...Living near the office is the Best Way to reduce consumption of natural resources!”

“Having a regional office is instrumental to the success of DEP from not only an enforcement perspective but also a public outreach perspective. Being located in Boston makes everyday tasks much more time consuming. We cannot access our files—they are located 40 minutes away from Boston. Inspections out of the office for lengthy periods of time - i.e. scheduled inspections are done for one or two days a week due to the inconvenience of being located in Boston. When we were located in the region – one could do an inspection in the am and then return to the office. Presently an inspection will book entire days out of the office. Hence we are not available to the public for greater periods of time. The Boston managers are telling the public that NERO likes being in Boston. Nothing could be farther from the truth. NERO HATES being in Boston. We need to go back to a regional office. Moving us to Boston has presented a negative impact on our lives, our jobs, and the protection of the environment. We were told that we are no longer about protecting the environment – but instead about “saving money.” Management has threatened to move infrastructure away from our homes => i.e. if we think things are bad now—they are going to get much worse.”

“Maintain regional offices so that communities can easily access staff and records. One central location in Boston does not work!”

“Restore a Region office in the region!”

“More access to the population DEP serves.”

“Moving NERO back to geographical center of NER, as well as ensuring that the other three Regional Offices remain in their present proximate areas, thus ensuring optimum customer service to the public and our regulated universe by maximizing ability at DEP to respond in a timely manner to Regional C & E and permitting related issues.”

“Relocating SERO, NERO and Boston to the 495 beltway would save 2 million dollars/yr. This money could be used to protect the environment by adding more technical staffing.”

“Decisions have been extremely short-sighted (moving NERO out of an \$18 sf building into a \$43-46 sf building for immediate savings – did not factor in costs of moving, amount of storage on files. Did not even appear to have an inkling as to what field staff actually do & resources need to function.”

“DEP needs to have four regional offices that are accessible to the public & facilities. Money could be saved on rent expenses by using state owned property or less expensive alternatives.”

“Moving NERO into the region—and moving non-essential Boston staff (i.e. everyone who doesn't need to be in Boston to do their job) into the region.”

“The idea of “centralization” is a poor one. Perhaps a knee jerk reaction to the current fiscal problems facing the Commonwealth.”

“Close the Boston office and create several smaller offices outside of Boston to be closer to the regulated communities.”

“To have a regional office as a separate cost center with files and vehicles for inspection. DEP should be more decentralized.”

“Consolidate regional office operations OUTSIDE of Boston. Move most of Boston Staff out of high rent district.”

Funding/Support

“Layoffs are targeting lower level staff further increasing top “heaviness. ‘A successful bee-hive is based upon a strong worker bee force, not solely the queen.’ Too many queens at DEP....not enough workers.”

“More cars, more cars, more money, more bodies, and more inspections.”

“Better funding of our agency.”

“\$ & enough people to do the job.”

“Layoffs (downsizing) and move mixed has really hurt morale + ability to do the job. Bringing vehicles and files to the location where staff are located will reduce travel time, increase efficiency, lower complaint response time. Increase number of communication devices will also increase flexibility, increase efficiency, and lower complaint response time. Complete installation of phones and computers to satellites offices. Be honest about closing of southeast regional offices, openly discuss plans to deal with SERO field issues.”

“Proper funding of staff & programs, which includes a properly funded regional office located in the region, not in Boston.”

“Sufficient funding, stronger backing from Governor Romney’s office and the legislature.”

“Restore funding would best improve many situations. This is followed by the isolation of managers from the staff. eg, when management funding-related changes such as lay offs, changes in permitting, staff had (I think) several valid points. These points were noted, but staff was told it could not “formally” connect.”

Leadership

“An acknowledgement that “we” are not the enemy, we are a part of a team trying to do a responsible job requiring well trained, experienced professionals.”

“A Governor who cared about the environment in Massachusetts and put TAE money into protecting it...”

“Need clear direction on priorities in light of current situation & they need to be realistic given our cuts.”

“Appointing a commissioner who has strong managerial talents, a good grasp of scientific and technical issues, and a regular size ego. This person should also have a strong sense of integrity and a mature personality. These characteristics are lacking in current senior management.”

““Central Command” needs to figure just what they want to do with DEP & where it is headed. Appears to be some confusion in leadership.”

“Eliminate Assistant Commissioner position. Each new Asst. Commissioner feels compelled to undertake a new initiative (i.e., last year’s Watershed Initiative) which results in staff being redirected from our main work & wasting a whole lot of time in needless meetings.”

“Reduction of middle management. Replacement of existing deputy and assistant commissioners. Too much of the staff’s time is spent determining how to implement new initiatives coming down from the commissioner’s office. No guidance is provided to staff

nor input requested from field staff to ensure that any new initiatives will positively effect our work and protection of the environment. Staff have spent upwards of a year on these initiatives only to have them dropped by the communications office.”

“Clear and articulated direction on mission and initiatives provided by upper management in a timely fashion. Existing processes “set us up to fail”!

“Get rid of existing senior management.”

Enforcement

“Restore staffing to the Bureau of Waste Site Cleanup. Sites are not being cleaned up. Companies know there is little risk of being audited if they do nothing. Even if DEP audits and finds out the company did nothing for ten years to clean up the site, they only get a Notice of Noncompliance and another chance to do the work before there’s any penalty.”

“Appears that 1-2 people are being escorted out of the building or suspended for ‘stealing political thunder’ while sr. mgt. in the chain of command during the ‘air emissions scandal’ have been quietly shuffled to other positions within Dept.”