



# EarthWatch Rhode Island



**Topic: Environmental Results Program for Underground Storage Tanks**

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## **Introduction**

Neighborhood dry cleaners, auto body shops, printers and gas stations – what do they all have in common? They all provide valuable and necessary services that we use everyday. But, they also generate pollution. Individually these "small" businesses and consumer activities do not contribute large amounts of pollution, but taken collectively they emit more of some types of pollutants than do some individual large industries. These businesses are subject to regulation by state and federal agencies concerned with air and water pollution, hazardous waste generation, and worker health and safety.

DEM has joined many other states and redesigned its approach to regulating these small businesses. The common-sense approach, known as an Environmental Results Program or ERP, helps facilities comply with environmental and occupational health regulations and improves environmental performance through a self-certification program administered the DEM. The program allows business owners, using a workbook and checklist, to self-certify to DEM that they are complying with the environmental requirements that apply to their business. The ERP makes it easier for small businesses to meet – and at times surpass – Rhode Island's environmental regulations at less cost to both government and business.

## **ERP and Petroleum Tanks**

Gas stations and other entities with underground storage tanks are the latest small business sector to partake in the ERP. Leaking underground tanks are the most common source of groundwater contamination, and petroleum is the most common contaminant. Two thirds of Rhode Island communities rely in whole or in significant part on groundwater for their drinking water supplies, and 12 of those communities derive all of their drinking water from groundwater.

Under legislation passed by the General Assembly in 2001, all underground storage tanks subject to registration must be inspected every two years. In a move to



**Jack Crawley, an Air Quality Specialist at the RIDEM and Ron Gagnon, chief of the Office of Technical and Customer Assistance, inspect an underground storage tank at a gas station.**

more effectively manage limited resources and, at the same time, educate regulated facilities about their environmental impact and obligations, DEM chose to take the self-certification "environmental results" approach. Along with self-certification, DEM randomly inspects about 100 of the facilities per year. Currently there are over 500 regulated facilities, mostly gas stations, with over 1,900 underground storage tanks. Data from both self-certification and inspections by DEM staff are used to strategically target inspections and compliance assistance efforts, track results to show success, and, as appropriate, take enforcement action.

DEM provides compliance assistance such as intensive training for owner/operators as well as a self-training workbook that explains all of a facility's environmental obligations as well as proposed pollution prevention practices. Owners and operators use the workbook to determine if their facility is in compliance, fill out an accompanying checklist, then submit a legally-binding certification statement to DEM. If the facility is not in compliance with a particular checklist item at the time of certification, detailed plans that address coming into conformance with environmental regulations must be submitted. DEM worked with a group of regional oil company representatives and gas station owners, and with the US Environmental Protection Agency's New England office, to develop the program.

To date, DEM has received certifications from 91% (607) of the 664 facilities and preliminary results indicate that approximate 75-80% are in full compliance with regulatory requirements.

The Department has also implemented voluntary ERP's for the autobody industry and exterior lead paint removal contractors. DEM is currently working on programs for auto salvage and dental sectors.

### **Interviews:**

- Ron Gagnon, Chief, Office of Technical and Customer Assistance
- Tom Breckel, Gas Station Manager/Participant in UST/ERP Development, East Side Mart/Shell Station
- Jack Crawley, Air Quality Specialist, DEM/Division of Air Resources



**Jack Crawley, an Air Quality Specialist in the Division of Air Resources at the RIDEM, demonstrates a pump inspection for Channel 10.**