

Ginger MacKnight, environmental and lab supervisor, Philip Sporn Plant, New Haven, W.Va.

Can you describe a typical day at the Sporn Plant?

A typical day at the plant involves an early review of the plant's environmental performance for the past 24 hours. Stack opacities are reviewed, logbooks are reviewed for any upset conditions not already known, and current performance is also checked. Any missing information or clarification of recent performance is then gathered. I attend a daily 10 a.m. staff meeting to provide information and receive information regarding the expected performance of the Sporn units. On any given day, information for air, water or waste reports is being compiled, or the reports are being completed and submitted.

How do you stay on top of all the environmental regulations and laws that govern a power plant to stay in compliance?

Corporate Environmental Services does a great job of providing the plant with the guidance needed to ensure compliance with environmental regulations. I also scan agency websites (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection, etc.) for developing news or upcoming regulatory proposals.

What is the most challenging part of your job? What is the most rewarding?

Often one of the most challenging parts of my jobs is trying to explain to employees why we do what we do in regards to various environmental rules and regulations. The rules and regulations (waste in particular) are different for the plant than they are for homeowners. What can simply be thrown into the garbage can at home must be specially packaged, documented and landfilled in a totally different way for the plant. Sometimes it's very hard to explain when they don't even seem to make sense to me.

The most rewarding part of my job is knowing that we are ready for an agency visit or inspection at any time. Last year our facility received 10 agency inspections and an internal audit. Some inspections were announced, and some inspections were unannounced. All agency inspections concluded with no findings or penalties. We were given a "green light" on our audit, and only minor deficiencies were noted.

Have you changed anything in the way you manage compliance based on lessons learned, audits or experience?

A huge help in managing environmental compliance has been the development and implementation of the Enviance system. Use of the system has enabled us to capture and list all required compliance activities and tasks in one place. The Enviance system then contacts individuals responsible for the completion of the tasks when they are due. Completion of the task is then documented in the system.

Over the years there have been many improvements in the hands-on portion of environmental compliance. Sample and data collection have become more modern and even automated. The semi-annual meeting of generation environmental professionals is a great opportunity to share success stories and even to discuss the "not so successful" stories. The periodic summary of environmental and safety/health audits distributed by Audit Services is also a great resource for ensuring our compliance.



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As the person primarily responsible for the emissions of an older coal-fired plant, what is your biggest concern?

One of my biggest concerns is the development and promulgation of regulations based on inconsistent data or research.

It seems that many have declared war on producers of electricity from coal-fired plants without weighing all the options and information. From the New Source Review information collection and decrees to the most recent crusade against coal combustion products, we are constantly on the defensive. Compliance with air, water and waste regulations and good environmental stewardship is no longer enough.

Looking ahead to the potential for changes to existing environmental regulations and the possibility of new rules, what do you think will be most challenging from your perspective?

The most challenging for our facility will be to stay competitive within the PJM system with the pending new rules. Currently an emission cost (SO_x, NO_x) is added to our busbar cost. The newer units throughout the system, with state-of-the-art emission control equipment, already beat our costs and are dispatched more frequently and longer than our units. More regulations and rules, such as carbon and mercury, will likely put us “out of the money” in terms of competitive dispatch costs.