JPP 373 - Environment Officer A

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Audience: Environment Agency

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Job Purpose

EOAs generally work in ether an EPR Waste or Land & Water Team. They are responsible for supporting the regulation of a range of sites/activities within their Area.

EOA is a career development grade, whereby new officers progress through three training stages and are then assessed to become EOBs. This progression starts with officers being fully supervised and gradually transitioning to require less support until, at EOB assessment stage, they can demonstrate the ability to work independently.

Those in Waste Teams support the regulation of permits/activities across sites such as composting facilities, transfer stations and materials recycling facilities. EO As working in Land & Water Teams regulate permitted sites & activities which impact upon land and water quality such as those carried out by water companies and farmers.

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They support EO Bs develop improvement plans for these sites, when necessary, and provide operators with advice and guidance. When appropriate they take enforcement action against poor performing operators.

EOAs respond to pollution and flooding incidents. With support, they act as Environment Management Duty Officers and/or Site Controllers, which involves taking calls and categorising incidents for further action and responding to incidents on the ground.

The EOA role is both office and field based.

Activities

Regulatory Compliance

Works with support of EOBs and Senior Environment Officers/equivalent to assess compliance with environmental legislation across a range of activities. This water abstraction, discharges to water, waste transfer, treatment and recycling.

This work is allocated by the Team Leader and/or Senior Environment Officer/equivalent and includes (under supervision/with support):

- Reviewing site documentation. This can include permits, environmental management systems, fire prevention plans, sector guidance, etc. They also review data submitted by permit/authorisation holders.
- Identifying and assessing non-compliance. Guidance is available to officers on assessing compliance at regulated sites. When a non-compliance is observed the EO A will record and categorise it. The categorisation is based on the risk to human health and the environment.
- Recording and reporting non-compliance. Compliance assessment reports constitute a formal record and appears on the public register and may be used as evidence in Court or at Appeal.

Taking enforcement action

EOAs initially support EOBs to take enforcement action against non-compliant operators and will progress to take more of a leading role. Enforcement action can range from warning letters, cautions and fixed penalty notices to formal prosecutions.

They use guidance (primarily the Investigations Manual, Offence Response Options and Enforcement & Prosecution Policy) to support their decision making.

EOAs help to gather the intelligence required to pursue investigations. Intelligence includes pulling together information from the public, details of vehicles used in suspected illegal activities, operator activity across sites, trends in sampling, etc.

They support in the production of witness statements, carrying out formal interviews under caution and producing case files which are necessary to take forward a prosecution and preparing evidence for court.

Incident response

EOAs support incident response, primarily those involving pollution events from regulated and un-regulated sites. They act as Environment Management Duty Officers (EMDOs) and/or Environment Management Site Controllers (EMSCs), initially supervised by EOBs, but it is expected that they will able to work in more of an independent capacity after around 6 months.

EMDOs are the first staff to respond to an incident. They take calls from the Incident Communication Service (ICS) and on the basis of the information provided carry out an initial assessment of the pollution event and classify the potential impact. This is a desk based activity.

EMSCs control tactical activities on the ground and this may also include other Environment Agency teams such as Fisheries, Analysis & Reporting and Sampling and Collection. They are also required to gather evidence of any offences (including taking samples, photographs and witness statements, if necessary).

Learning and Development

There is a significant amount of learning to undertake as an EOA. EOAs are required to complete training outlined in the New EO Development Log and complete their A to B Development Portfolio to progress to EOB grade.

Dealing with enquiries and representing the Environment Agency

EOAs deal with complaints and enquires from members of the public, often acting as first point of contact. This may be on the telephone, via email or face to face. Their responses will be supported by an EOB, SEO or Team Leader. Technical or specialist enquiries will be passed to and handled by EOBs or more senior officers.

Some examples of typical enquiries/complaints:

- People wanting to know more about a specific permit application and the potential impacts the proposal may have on them.
- Complaints from members of public about perceived mismanagement of permitted sites/activities, including what action we are taking. EOAs may also attend public liaison meetings to support EOBs, SEOs and/or Team Leaders.
- General enquiries about the environment and regulation

Advice and Freedom of Information Requests

EOAs coordinate local responses to internal consultations on applications and proposed permitting decisions. They will also collate information for freedom of information requests or other data requests and this information will be reviewed by EOBs, SEOs or Team Leaders before despatch.

With support, EOAs will respond to enquiries and information requests from internal customers requiring information on a range of issues such as site/company performance, sector performance or sector specific activities.

IT and Administrative Aspects

- EOAs are required to be methodical in their record keeping and use a large number of IT systems and databases.
- They are also responsible for chasing up unpaid subsistence fees from their operators.
- Much of the documentation they produce is on the public record. They maintain spreadsheets to support them plan and organize their workload.

Deliverables

- Working with EOBs and SEOs to assess compliance of permitted and unpermitted activities in accordance with organisation Key Performance Indicators.
- Recording outcomes from compliance assessments. These set out our expectations of operators and provide deadlines and the actions necessary to be taken by the operator. These notifications must be uploaded to the Document Management Service (DMS).
- Enforcement – working to timescales agreed by EOBs, Team Leaders (in conjunction with AEMs and Legal).
- Responding to enquiries within SLAs; from the public, operators, local authorities, consultants and special interest groups. Freedom of Information requests on issues and data of permitted sites. This may include responses to MP's.
- Incidents – We must categorise incidents, using the Common Incident Classification Scheme, within 30 minutes and take subsequent action according to this assessment.

People Management

N/A

Challenges

Dealing with difficult people. Our officers deal with challenging behaviour from both Operators and the public. They must confidently and calmly respond to people and manage conflict in a positive way to diffuse the situation. They are required to demonstrate the behaviours expected of them as professional regulators representing the Environment Agency.

Breadth of the role – EOAs need a breadth of knowledge and skills which they will develop from both formal training and 'on the job' learning from experience. They are required to manage the various and competing workloads and priorities and move between them. For example, they may be working to help respond to a pollution incident but may also be called upon to provide input to a response to an MP enquiry and then be asked to respond to a complaint from a member of the public.

Learning. There is a substantial amount of training which is undertaken as part of the A to B scheme. EOAs are required to complete a new officer development log which covers all aspects of regulation. Completion of the Log takes around 6 months. Some training is classroom based but there is also a large amount of e-learning which requires significant self-motivation. A more significant proportion of learning & development is carried out in the field.

Interaction with Others

EOAs interact with a broad range of customers and stakeholders (see below), both internally and externally. This is done face to face, on the telephone, by email and/or other correspondence. Most of the interactions are to exchange information, share knowledge and provide updates.

Internally:

EA teams including Groundwater & Contaminated Land, Hydrometry, Telemetry, Biodiversity & Geomorphology, EPE Teams, National Permitting Service, Ops Regulatory Service, Natural England.

Externally:

Operators, Local Authorities, MP's, County/Parish Councillors, Fire & Rescue Service, Drainage Boards, River & Wildlife Trusts, HSE.

Budget Responsibilities

No direct budget responsibility but work within their team's budget.

Experience Requirements

- Able to deal with customers face to face/by telephone/via correspondence in a professional manner.
- Ability to deal with difficult customers, demonstrating emotional intelligence and rational thinking.
- Flexible and able to adapt to changing work priorities.
- Comfortable with the use of technical language.
- Good IT skills, including the use of Microsoft Office applications.
- Able to input and manipulate data on spreadsheets/databases.
- Environmental knowledge/interest is expected.

Educational Requirements

On entry EOAs must be able to demonstrate a minimum educational attainment equivalent to level 3 (A level), particularly in science or a technical discipline.

Professional Qualification Requirements

N/A

Additional Information

The EOA role is a career grade, linked to EOB. There is significant amount of learning.

The progression time between EOA and EO B is around18 months. Initially EOBs will supervise tasks and check the work of the EO As to ensure the work is of the standard expected. As the EOA's knowledge and capability develop, the amount of supervision and support provided by the EO Bs and Team Leaders reduces. As such, many EOAs lead on straightforward, less complex pieces of work, with some supervision and support after around 6-9 months.