

Internship in Excellence Program Instills Passion for Solid Waste in Students

In a time when the waste industry faces labor shortages, bringing in young talent is imperative. For 2 years, EREF's Internship in Excellence Program (IEP) has connected full-time students with waste industry companies in the hopes of opening students' eyes to the important role the industry plays in the sustainability movement and encouraging students to pursue a career in the solid waste field. Students work full-time over the summer, learning the ins and outs of solid waste, and, upon completion of the internship and other requirements, interns are eligible for a scholarship.

In 2019, IEP interns Jessica Babb and Samantha Steele received scholarships. Below, they discuss the value of their experiences.

Jessica Babb Purdue University

This summer I interned at Casella Waste Systems, which is a waste management company based in Rutland, Vermont. Casella Waste Systems is a mid-size company that operates mainly in the Northeast United States including states such as New York, New Hampshire, Maine, Vermont and Massachusetts. They provide services such as collection, recycling, transfer and disposal of waste. I was lucky enough to see a couple of their facilities including a landfill, composting site, and a recycling facility. Throughout the summer I was able to see how many of their departments operated and gain more knowledge on the waste industry.



While at Casella, I worked as an Environmental Engineering intern in the Environmental Compliance Department. I worked with the Vice President of Engineering and Compliance to update Casella's facility list. The facility list already had information like whether or not the property is owned or leased, the address, and also the name of environmental analysts overseeing the property. I expanded the list by adding the parcel number, zoning, acreage, and owner of each property. I found this information on county and town websites that gave public access to property data. Once I collected all the data, I had a meeting with one of the environmental analyst to ask questions about property information I found and filled in the missing gaps. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, I was unable to talk to the other environmental analysts and fill in the

rest of the missing information. Luckily, I reformatted the excel sheet to make it more appealing and also easy for the next person who will be working on the list to follow.

This project might not have had a direct impact on the waste industry, but it does impact Casella in a small way. Gathering all this information into one excel sheet helps Casella gain a better understanding of all the properties they own. This will

help them know where they have room to expand and build more facilities in the future.

I also worked with the environmental analyst located at Casella's home office and read through a newly released Storm Water Permitting Rule for Vermont. I used the property list I expanded on to find the Casella's properties that might be subjected to the rule. I gathered up this information and put it into a document for the Environmental Compliance team to view. This permitting project does not have a major impact on the waste industry, but it helps Casella keep up with new permits and remain in compliance.

Working at Casella was a great experience because I was able to get a preview of what it will be like working full-time. I also learned more about the waste industry and just how important it is to everyday life. I hope to continue learning more about the waste industry, so I can contribute more in the future.

Samantha Steele

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Normally, when people hear the phrase "ride along", what they imagine is a rookie police officer riding in a patrol car with an experienced officer. My ride along however, was rather unique and quite a different experience. As part of my internship with Republic Services, I had the opportunity to participate in a ride along on a garbage truck and learned a great deal along the way.



My morning began with an alarm sounding at 1:30 AM, as I needed to be ready at the facility at 3:00 AM. Based on this early start, I immediately gained an incredible amount of respect for the drivers who were able to wake up so early every single day. Once I arrived at the facility, I was greeted by smiling faces and an abundance of hot coffee. The workday started with an informational video regarding a few changes the company was implementing, and next there was a discussion with the full staff regarding changes in pick up routes and personnel. Once the drivers were aware of any variations to their normal routes, the team was ready to head out onto the road at approximately 3:30 AM. Ready for my adventure, I laced up my boots and hopped into the truck. Luckily, I had been paired with a very enthusiastic driver with whom I would spend the next 6 hours.

Our route was primarily commercial, picking up and unloading dumpsters at restaurants, convenience stores, gas stations, apartment complexes, and many more locations. What impressed me the most was the skill the driver possessed throughout the entirety of the ride along. First, he needed to understand how to navigate such a large vehicle, driving on both highways and back roads. In addition, at all times he was in full control of the vehicle when he extended the arms of the truck in order to lift the dumpsters to drop the load in the cabin. Lastly, my driver had his route of over 80 stops completely memorized, including the best way to drive to each location and then the quickest approach to reach the dumpsters.

Being out on the road and the opportunity to witness the waste industry through the ride along was extremely beneficial. Although I was absolutely exhausted, by the end of our ride along I had learned many aspects of the waste industry that I could not have gleaned from my desk in the office. I gained the utmost respect for the front-line workers who are extremely knowledgeable, skilled and dedicated, and I wish more people appreciated how vital their work is for everyone in the community. I am thrilled that I had this opportunity and would recommend that anyone in the waste industry participate in a ride along to truly appreciate the importance of this industry.

For more information on the IEP, [click here](#).