



“From the Director”

Brian R. Leahy, Director
Department of Pesticide Regulation

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Good Luck Maria!

With great pride and a touch of sadness, the Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) said farewell and good luck to Maria Paz, who has spent the past four months with us as a Polanco Fellow.

Maria graduated from the University of Redlands in May 2011 with bachelor degrees in arts in Spanish and global business. She spent the spring of 2010 studying in Barcelona, Spain, under the IES Abroad international study program.

We were thrilled when this talented and bright young woman chose DPR in which to spend the first leg of her yearlong fellowship. She will spend the next eight months with Assemblyman Manuel Pérez of Coachella Valley learning about the California Legislature.

The Polanco Fellowship was established as a nonpartisan effort in 2002 by the California Latino Legislative Caucus, the California Latino Legislative Caucus Institute for Public Policy (CLLCIPP), known as the California Latino Caucus Institute, is a broad-based public policy, educational, and leadership development organization.

Maria learned the nuts and bolts of our organization, including registration, environmental monitoring, worker health and safety, pest management and licensing, product compliance, enforcement and personnel services. We wanted to provide her with a window into the inner-workings of a state department.

She accompanied DPR scientists when they sampled soil and collected fresh produce for our monitoring programs and provided integrated pest management training for a school district. She was with enforcement staff when they found pesticide applicators in violation for not wearing gloves, face masks and other required safety equipment.

Maria used her bilingual skills to translate a new brochure about pesticide drift from English to Spanish and attended a biopesticide conference at the University of California, Davis.

Maria is a native of Mexico who moved to the Coachella Valley in Riverside County when she was 4. She is the youngest of six children. Her father recently retired as a farmworker who applied pesticides by tractor six days a week beginning at 5 a.m.

“He took me to work with him sometimes,” she said. “I would sit with him on the tractor. I thought I was familiar with pesticides, but realized I didn’t know much about them when I got to DPR. The experience at DPR has been eye-opening. I’m a lot more aware now of what goes on in the fields. There’s so much science involved!”

“I also got a good sense of the responsibilities of each branch at DPR and how they all correlate. Everyone is very passionate about what they do and want to make a difference.”

Maria said her experience at DPR has motivated her to consider a career in the public sector.

Maria’s brief tenure at DPR was a rewarding experience for the department. The act of developing a comprehensive training program and explaining each of the branch functions was as much a learning exercise for staff as it was for Maria. Because Maria brought such intelligence, enthusiasm and competence to each of her assigned tasks, those who worked with her were able to see their own work with new insight. It was an honor to host and educate a future leader of California.

Contact: Lea Brooks, DPR Communications Director, lbrooks@cdpr.ca.gov, 916-445-3974