

Part I – Agency Profile

Agency Overview

The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) was established by the Environmental Protection and Health Act, Chapter 1, Title 39, Idaho Code, to protect human health and the environment. As the state's environmental regulatory agency, DEQ is responsible for implementing and enforcing delegated federal programs under the Clean Air, Clean Water, Safe Drinking Water, and Resource Conservation and Recovery Acts, as well as many state environmental laws and rules. This regulatory responsibility covers a broad range of activities to ensure Idaho's air, water, land, and Idaho citizens are protected from the adverse impacts of pollution.

The Environmental Protection and Health Act also established the Board of Environmental Quality. The board is the administrative body charged with making decisions on rules proposed by the department to carry out provisions of the act and to enforce state environmental laws. DEQ drafts rules with assistance from the Office of the Attorney General following a negotiated rulemaking process involving interested stakeholders. Rules may be adopted, amended, or repealed by the board. All administrative rules adopted by the board are subject to legislative review. The board also functions as the agency's administrative appeals board. Decisions of the agency can be appealed to the board, which may choose to hear the case or designate a hearing officer. Final determinations of the board are subject to judicial review.

To protect human health and the environment, DEQ's primary activities include monitoring, permitting, conducting inspections, performing remediation, and providing a wide range of oversight, technical assistance, and outreach.

- Environmental monitoring is performed to assess conditions and ensure health-based standards are met.
- Permits are issued to facilities that manage wastes or release pollutants to limit discharges to safe levels.
- Inspections of pollution sources are conducted and complaints are investigated to ensure compliance with environmental regulations and standards. When necessary, enforcement action is taken.
- Remediation is conducted to remove or neutralize contaminants in soil, ground water, and surface waters. Compliance with remedial activities is typically voluntary, but when necessary, enforcement action is taken.
- Oversight is maintained for a variety of projects including environmental cleanups, pollution reduction efforts, and drinking water and wastewater infrastructure improvements.
- Technical support, outreach, and education are offered to facilitate compliance with environmental requirements for air quality, water quality, and waste management and remediation.

DEQ works closely and collaboratively with a wide range of public and private partners including the legislature; the Board of Environmental Quality; federal and state agencies; city, county, and tribal governments; businesses; community organizations; and citizens. These partnerships are critical to accomplishing the agency's mission.

DEQ's headquarters in Boise is organized into five divisions focused on developing and administering programs and policies, providing technical support to the divisions and regions, and providing agencywide administrative support. The divisions include Air Quality, Surface Water and Wastewater, Drinking Water and Finance, Waste Management and Remediation, and Technical Services.

Day-to-day, on-the-ground agency services are provided by six regional offices located in Boise, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho Falls, Lewiston, Pocatello, and Twin Falls. Regional offices are charged with implementing agency programs and policies and providing direct services to citizens, communities, businesses, and industries.

Core Functions/Idaho Code

DEQ's core functions and regulatory authorities are summarized below, followed by a table detailing the department's revenues and expenditures for the past four fiscal years.

- **Air Quality:** DEQ ensures compliance with federal and state health-based air quality standards by collecting air quality information, monitoring, developing and issuing permits, conducting inspections at facilities, responding to complaints, and coordinating air quality improvement efforts among communities, citizen groups, businesses, industries, other state agencies, tribes, and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (Title 39, Chapter 1, Idaho Code; Clean Air Act).
- **Water Quality:** DEQ protects the surface and ground waters of the state to support beneficial uses and provide safe drinking water supplies by setting water quality standards, certifying project compliance with standards, monitoring, reporting on water quality, developing and implementing improvement plans, issuing wastewater reuse and direct discharge permits, and providing grants and loans for constructing drinking water and wastewater treatment facilities (Title 39, Chapters 1, 36, 66, 76, 79, 85, Idaho Code; Title 37, Chapter 21, Idaho Code; Title 50 Chapter 13 Idaho Code; Clean Water Act).
- **Waste Management and Remediation:** DEQ ensures management and disposal of waste generated in or entering Idaho is conducted in a manner protective of human health and the environment. DEQ responds to releases of hazardous substances to surface waters, ground waters, or soils and conducts, oversees, and negotiates cleanup of contaminated sites. DEQ works with communities to rehabilitate contaminated sites to return them to a safe and developable condition (Title 39, Chapters 1, 30, 44, 58, 65, 71, 72, 74, 81, 88, Idaho Code; Resource Conservation and Recovery Act; Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act).
- **INL Oversight:** DEQ oversees activities at the Idaho National Laboratory (INL) to ensure compliance with legal agreements and environmental regulations for waste treatment, remediation, and removal. DEQ maintains an independent environmental monitoring program designed to verify and supplement monitoring programs carried out by the INL. Working with other state agencies, DEQ assists local governments statewide in planning and responding to emergencies involving radiological materials. DEQ also routinely informs the public about INL activities impacting Idaho's environment (Title 39, Chapter 1, Idaho Code).

Revenues and Expenditures

Revenue	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
Air Quality Permitting	\$1,126,068	\$793,865	\$1,214,168	\$623,131
Public Water System Oversight	\$1,620,766	\$1,747,254	\$1,570,492	\$1,703,72
Water Pollution Control	\$4,823,587	\$4,823,194	\$4,804,852	\$4,811,893
Environmental Remediation	\$2,110,912	\$2,081,704	\$365,641	\$305,231
Cooperative DEQ-Federal	\$23,280,316	\$21,414,464	\$18,618,610	\$18,457,231
Cooperative DEQ-General	\$20,751,696	\$22,013,564	\$20,963,476	\$22,354,990
Cooperative DEQ-Other	\$2,115,232	\$4,268,183	\$2,602,490	\$3,986,090
Bunker Hill Consent Decree	\$179,326	\$287,571	\$2,124,981	\$2,163,701
Underground Storage Tank Fees	\$196,085	\$198,558	\$199,816	\$187,445
Idaho Pollutant Discharge Elimination System	--- ^a	\$764,771	\$1,170,992	\$1,248,714
Total	\$56,203,988	\$58,393,128	\$53,635,518	\$55,842,197
Expenditures	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
Personnel Costs	\$30,856,108	\$31,381,508	\$30,027,626	\$32,097,049
Operating Expenditures	\$13,397,042	\$12,333,133	\$12,494,236	\$12,885,481
Capital Outlay	\$542,398	\$414,156	\$404,646	\$2,577,825
Trustee/Benefit Payments	\$6,368,776	\$7,202,156	\$5,773,975	\$4,534,373
Total	\$51,164,325	\$51,330,953	\$48,700,483	\$52,094,728

a. FY 2020 is the first year DEQ has received this revenue source.

Profile of Cases Managed and/or Key Services Provided

The following table summarizes some of the key services DEQ provides to communities, businesses, industries, and the citizens of Idaho.

Cases Managed and/or Key Services Provided	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
Air Quality Division				
Air Quality Permits to Construct Issued	72	70	68	84
Air Quality Tier I (Title V) Permits Issued	18	13	14	17
Air Quality Tier II Permits Issued	1	1	1	2
Air Quality Permits by Rule Issued	26	40	31	38
Inspections of Stationary and Portable Air Pollution Sources	197	212	214	228
Number of Crop Residue Acres Approved and Burned	40,104	34,312	54,347	27,652
Water Quality Divisions				
Wastewater Grants Awarded	\$343,500	\$326,625	\$303,460	\$720,343
Wastewater Loans Awarded	\$53,423,000	\$65,765,815	\$38,577,250	\$31,007,000
Drinking Water Grants Awarded	\$248,935	\$339,250	\$347,500	\$891,452
Drinking Water Loans Awarded	\$6,058,650	\$62,679,141	\$19,285,914	\$11,522,820
401/404 Water Quality Certifications Issued	48	57	47	20
Wastewater Reuse Permits Issued	23 ^a	12 ^a	5 ^a	7 ^a
IPDES Direct Discharge Permits Issued	1	9	7	10
Total Wastewater Engineering Plan and Specification Reviews Completed	256	400	402	436
Total Drinking Water Engineering Plan and Specification Reviews Completed	409	470	492	508
Drinking Water Sanitary Surveys Completed	441	342 ^b	390	369
Source Water Assessments Completed	102	110	83	49
Active Nonpoint Source Projects Administered (Previous Calendar Year)	45	42	47	35
Nonpoint Source Projects Completed (Previous Calendar Year)	9	3	19	13
Beneficial Use Reconnaissance Program (BURP) Sites Surveyed	242	235	0 ^c	265
Waste Management and Remediation Division				
Leaking Underground Storage Tank Cleanups Completed	16	21	11	18
Underground Storage Tank Training and Inspections Completed	338	285	487	371
Hazardous Waste Inspections Conducted	111	85	93	117
Three-to-five-year inspections of municipal solid waste landfills completed (three are required)	6	2	6	6
Snake River Plain Environmental Samples Analyzed (for INL)	6,027	5,809	6,159	5,644
Pollution Prevention Technical Assistance Efforts	110	78	96	90

a. Loss of key staff statewide and difficulty filling open positions has affected these numbers.

b. The drop in surveys is due to COVID 19. From the end of quarter 3 through quarter 4, sanitary surveys were suspended by DEQ and the health districts.

c. All BURP monitoring occurs in summer (Q1); BURP was suspended due to COVID and budget reductions.

FY 2022 Performance Highlights

Air Quality— This year, for the first time ever, Idaho is in full “attainment”, meaning complying with the National Ambient Air Quality Standards, known as NAAQS. DEQ successfully obtained approval from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for the remaining two nonattainment areas in Idaho to redesignate Franklin County and West Silver Valley to attainment for the Clean Air Act fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) NAAQS.

For several years, DEQ partnered with local communities, local businesses, and airshed advisory groups to reduce harmful particulate pollution from woodstoves, motor vehicles, and road dust. The community outreach and education efforts made these pollution reductions effective. Achieving attainment status statewide is a testament to the strong regional partnerships DEQ developed over the years.

In addition, the division announced its new app, AIR Idaho, which provides forecasted and current air quality information to help protect public health during poor air quality episodes. The AIR Idaho app features air quality information relative to location and an interactive real-time map that displays data from over 30 monitoring stations across the state. A 3-day forecast details whether the air quality is expected to deteriorate and reports when air quality is expected to improve. The app also features real-time information related open burning restrictions, a list of regional and statewide air quality resources, tips to stay safe during a smoke or inversion event, and information on how to protect our air. The app is a free download from the App Store for iPhone or Google Play. Users can select a location to receive information for a specific area and enable notifications to receive information on local air quality advisories and burn restrictions.

The Air Quality Division also completed a thorough evaluation and conducted negotiated rulemaking pursuant to Executive Order No. 2020-01 (Zero-Based Regulation) of IDAPA 58.01.01 Rules for the Control of Air Pollution in Idaho, removing 689 restrictive words and 26,104 total words from the chapter.

Water Quality— In federal fiscal year-2022, EPA provided DEQ with an additional \$126,000 in Public Water System Supervision (PWSS) grant funding. This additional funding is being used for activities that deal with emerging contaminants such as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and cyanotoxins. The Drinking Water Bureau is continuing to implement the drinking water source sampling project started in state fiscal year 2021, to evaluate the presence and sources of PFAS in Idaho’s public drinking water. Sampling began in spring 2021 and will continue through 2022. As of August 24, 2022, DEQ has received 207 PFAS sampling results. Of these 207 samples, 24 have detected PFAS in the public water system source. DEQ is working with the systems that have detected the PFOA and PFOS analytes, as these have lifetime health advisories set by EPA and EPA has announced their intent to develop a maximum contaminant level for them by the end of calendar year 2023. If EPA provides additional funding for emerging contaminants in their federal fiscal year 2023 PWSS grant DEQ will continue the sampling project into calendar year 2023. Additionally, DEQ has purchased cyanotoxin test kits consisting of test strips, test strip reading equipment, and sampling bottles with the emerging contaminant funding. These testing kits have been deployed to DEQ regional offices that have public water systems utilizing surface water as their drinking water source. These kits are available for public water system use free of charge to help monitor and develop cyanotoxin sampling and response plans for these water systems.

The Surface Water and Wastewater Division completed evaluation and negotiated rulemaking pursuant to Executive Order No. 2020-01 (Zero-Based Regulation) of IDAPA 58.01.17 Recycled Water Rules, removing 117 restrictive words and 3,186 total words from the chapter. Arsenic human health criteria were also updated and approved by the Board of Environmental Quality.

Waste Management and Remediation—Programs within the Waste Management and Remediation Division continue to develop and update a number of outreach materials to help the regulated community achieve better compliance. Programs address outreach needs based on the specific topics and questions that arise from stakeholders and regulated facilities. When similar questions are asked by several stakeholders or when DEQ staff members identify an outreach need, a fact sheet or other outreach material is developed for that topic. In addition, existing factsheets are updated to include new knowledge or current information when applicable.

The Hazardous Waste Bureau utilized EPA multipurpose grant funding to modify the updated the Idaho Hazardous Waste Annual Report (HWAR) software. The original HWAR software application was developed in

2004, and the software was no longer supported and did not meet current server, network, and cybersecurity requirements. Between May and December 2020, DEQ contracted with a company to develop a new HWAR application that has improved functionality. In FY22, the contractor made additional modification to correct and enhance the HWAR software application. Additionally, the Hazardous Waste Bureau continues to work on an electronic Inspector Toolbox, which includes regulatory interpretations, templates, brochures and fact sheets, and checklists. The program has also implemented a training program for our new inspectors and implemented monthly trainings for the entire group.

Part II – Performance Measures

DEQ's target performance measures are used to track and report progress in meeting the overall agency goal of protecting public health and the environment. These targets were chosen because each tracks measurable agency actions and reflects an actual environmental or public health outcome or result. Each performance measure is revisited annually through the strategic planning process to ensure its continued relevance.

Goals and Performance Measures

We successfully completed several objectives that improved air quality, prioritized impaired waters, and identified new, existing contaminated sites. As a result, the Air Quality, Water Quality, and Waste Management and Remediation Divisions developed new objectives for the next fiscal year. FY 2023 targets are provided in the Goals and Performance Measures table.

Performance Measure 1—This performance measure is determined by any single air monitor reaching unhealthy, which is identified as *red* on the Air Quality Index (AQI) scale. If multiple air monitors reach unhealthy air quality levels on the same day, it still counts as 1 day. A vast majority of measured unhealthy days can result from exceptional events such as wildfire and dust.

Performance Measure 2—Derived from DEQ's 2022 Integrated Report, this performance measure compares the number of river and stream miles that support beneficial uses to the number of assessed river and stream miles.

Performance Measure 3—Since issuing the strategic plan in July 2022, the numbers for this measure have been updated. Based on the beginning of the state fiscal year, the target of 235 sites is a 10% reduction in the 261 open contaminated sites (3,010 total known contaminated sites). This performance measure includes leaking underground storage tanks and general remediation sites. Contaminated site closure is complete when contaminant concentrations meet acceptable risk-based or other approved criteria through assessment or remediation activities. This performance measure excludes sites under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (Superfund), including mega sites, such as the Idaho National Laboratory and Bunker Hill; Department of Defense cleanup sites; hazardous waste sites; and solid waste facilities.

Performance Measure 4—This performance measure is based on wastewater reuse applications, IPDES applications, drinking water and wastewater plan and specification submittals, air quality permit applications, and hazardous waste permit applications.

Performance Measure 5—This performance measure is based on 5-year averages across programs. Each program measures compliance differently. Annual updates will be made to the benchmark.

Performance Measure 6—This performance measure includes air quality permits to construct, water quality reuse and IPDES permits, and hazardous waste permits. The IPDES Program inherited a permit backlog that will require 1-to-2 permit cycles (5–10 years) to meet the national goal of 90% current permits.

Performance Measure 7—Continuous improvement is a long-term approach to systematically target and incrementally change processes to improve efficiency and quality within the agency. Using the kaizen philosophy and a lean process focus, DEQ will examine our processes in detail and determine output improvements. All staff are encouraged to suggest and implement changes that create continuous improvement within the regions and across the agency.

Performance Measure 8—This newly developed performance measure will evaluate employee engagement and retention over time. As an organization, DEQ wants to ensure employees feel connected to the agency, our mission, and the strategic plan. If employees are engaged, they are happier and more productive, which results in less turnover, an expensive issue for DEQ. Assessing engagement and turnover will help us determine if we are achieving this goal. DEQ revised the performance measure and benchmark for FY2023 to be based on the FY2021 elective, nonretirement turnover rate, instead of amount, which was used for FY2022. The new benchmark of 6.2% reflects a 10% decrease in turnover rate from FY2021's 6.9%.

Goals and Performance Measures						
Performance Measure		FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023
Goal 1						
<i>Make recognizable and measurable environmental improvements</i>						
1. Reduce number of unhealthy days based on the Air Quality Index (AQI) throughout the state	actual	11 days	2 days	16 days	17 days	
	target	0 days	0 days	0 days	0 days	0 Days
2. Increase the percentage of assessed rivers and streams supporting beneficial uses	actual	33%	33%	35%	35%	
	target	35%	35%	35%	35%	35%
3. Reduce the number of known contaminated sites	actual	237 sites	234 sites	227	261	
	target	247 sites	213 sites	211 sites	204 sites	235 sites
Goal 2						
<i>Provide first-class customer service as a trusted source for environmental leadership</i>						
4. Increase the percentage of complete permit applications and facility plan and specification submittal packages on initial submittal	actual	71%	45%	66%	67%	
	target	82%	82%	82%	82%	82%
5. Increase the compliance rate of inspected facilities	actual	82% ^a	80%	74%	73%	
	target	82%	82%	82%	82%	82%
Goal 3						
<i>Foster a culture of continuous improvement</i>						
6. Increase the percentage of permits issued before deadline	actual	88%	80%	61%	62%	
	target	81%	81%	81%	81%	81%
7. Conduct 50 Lean improvement projects per year	actual	-----	12%	42%	26%	
	target	n/a	100%	100%	100%	100%
8. Reduce the rate of elective, non-retirement turnover in the agency.	actual	-----	-----	-----	(88%)	
	target	n/a ^b	n/a ^b	n/a ^b	13.5% ^c	6.2% ^c

a. IPDES is excluded this year because the program does not have a full year of data to report.

b. In 2021, DEQ developed a new performance measure and objectives under Goal 3, and data are not available.

c. The FY2021 performance measure was to reduce the *amount* of elective, non-retirement turnover in the agency. 88% in FY2022 represents an increase in the amount of turnover from FY2021. The performance measure has been revised for FY2023 to reduce the *rate* of elective, non-retirement turnover in the agency.

Performance Analysis—Over past fiscal years, DEQ has met or exceeded a majority of its performance measurement targets. In the coming year, DEQ will continue to make action-based progress with updated performance measures and objectives. Along with meeting new performance measures, DEQ is faced with the additional challenges as described below:

Air Quality Goal 1 (Performance Measure 1)—When DEQ developed new performance measures in 2017, the measure to reduce the number of unhealthy air quality days was based on the AQI scale during the calendar year. For CY 2017 the number was 25 days. On further review and to ensure consistency with other performance measures, DEQ changed this measure from calendar year to state fiscal year and continues to report on a state fiscal year basis.

Reducing the number of unhealthy air quality days based on the AQI is a reasonable measure to report; however, DEQ's success in meeting this measure is subject to the whim of wildfires and weather. From spring through fall, wildfire smoke can have a significant impact on the AQI. In SFY 2022, DEQ reported 17 days in the unhealthy or worse AQI category of which two were not the result of wildfires or dust events. These events occurred on September 21 and November 2, 2021, and were due to localized emissions. Looking back, DEQ has observed a similar number of days with unhealthy AQI readings recorded. For example, in SFY 2021 there were 16 days observed, most of which were attributed to wildfire smoke.

Water Quality Goal 1 (Performance Measure 2)—This represents the total percentage of stream miles assessed as Category 1 or 2 in Idaho's 2022 Integrated Report approved on May 25, 2022. The next Integrated Report will not be submitted for EPA approval until approximately April 1, 2024; this number will remain unchanged until then.

Waste Management and Remediation Goal 1 (Performance Measure 3)—The number of contaminated sites identified under performance measure 3 fluctuates. There continues to be a number of new contaminated sites identified each year, and this results in slower progress made in reducing the overall number of contaminated sites. For example, during FY 2022, there were 110 sites closed, but 144 new sites were identified, which is a net increase of 34 sites overall for the fiscal year. These contaminated sites are the result of petroleum and chemical releases that are not predictable. Therefore, for some years the number of contaminated sites may increase while in other years the number may decrease. In addition, some sites are not necessarily new (recent) releases but are newly identified or previously unaccounted for sites that were not previously included in the contaminated sites inventory.

Agencywide Goals 2 and 3 (Performance Measures 4, 5, and 6)—Beginning in mid-March 2020, DEQ temporarily halted certain routine inspections as regulated facilities and the state dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts to facility operations and the availability of both DEQ inspector and facility staff to accommodate routine inspections. Routine inspections were resumed in early June 2020 according to an internal standard operating procedure, *Procedures for Routine Inspections During COVID-19*, and an addendum to the DEQ Health and Safety Plan to address employee exposure to COVID-19 while traveling and performing essential fieldwork activities. COVID-19 continued to impact DEQ's ability to conduct inspections across programs through FY2022.

In FY 2021, DEQ assumed delegated authority for non-storm water, generally permitted discharge facilities, bringing the total number of permitted facilities under DEQ authority to over 300. DEQ continues to inherit administratively continued permits from EPA resulting in a lower amount of permits being issued before the deadline. DEQ strives to meet the performance goal of reissuing permits prior to their expiration.

DEQ has improved technical and compliance assistance to facilities permitted under IPDES and reuse permits by providing routine review of monitoring reports and the ability to respond quickly when a potential issue is identified. This results in fewer facilities having violations identified at the time of inspection or having violations compile over time without being addressed. Fewer violations means an improved rate of compliance.

DEQ's programs are often challenged to develop timely outreach materials and to conduct outreach activities that improve compliance rates of regulated facilities under the agencywide performance measure 5. Over the last couple of years the annual compliance rates have decreased under performance measure 5. Identifying specific compliance issues and providing education and outreach to regulated facilities on those compliance issues as well as conducting general outreach should help increase overall compliance as measured under performance measure 5. To that end, in FY2022 the hazardous waste program conducted 34 Compliance Assistance Visits, in-person evaluations with an inspector during which the inspectors provide feedback on how to correct deficiencies.

These visits constitute almost 32% of the program's compliance-related evaluations. Staff from the Underground Storage Tank program participated in the Idaho Petroleum Marketer's Convention to answer questions, provide technical assistance, and update operators on upcoming activities. The Air Quality Division is working to increase compliance through workshops explaining how to develop and submit a complete permit application.

Lean Improvement Goal 3 (Performance Measure 7)— Thirty-eight lean improvement projects were scheduled this year, and 13 projects were completed. Currently, 25 projects are underway.

- **Measurement**—Senior management staff were asked to have their staff submit descriptions of completed or ongoing projects for inclusion toward the strategic plan goal. Projects that are counted toward this performance measure were to include a basic description of the problem and the countermeasures implemented or proposed to solve the problem. Thirteen projects were completed during the fiscal year. An additional 25 projects are proposed or in-progress. Projects that were listed as underway in the previous fiscal year were not included towards the performance measure number this fiscal year unless they were completed, in which case they were counted as a completed project.
- **Staff training**- DEQ continued to provide regular staff training on lean principles throughout the fiscal year. 42 staff were provided with training through nine Lean Practitioner courses. In August 2021, staff from the waste program participated in a lean event to identify opportunities for reducing lead time in the consent order process. Staff identified numerous opportunities to reduce defects and modify processes that could help to reduce lead time for the issuance of consent orders by 50-75%
- **Miscellaneous barriers to project completion**—As with previous years, staff continue to cite persistent barriers to project implementation. Time constraints remain the most frequently identified cause. Staff turnover has also emerged as a barrier to project implementation. While DEQ has observed higher rates of success in implementation through group collaboration, such as through facilitated events like those undertaken by waste program staff, turnover has reduced the likelihood of implementation as project leads or other essential personnel leave the agency.

Employee Engagement Goal 3 (Performance Measure 8)—This effort will measure employee engagement and retention over a 3-year time frame. DEQ believes engaged employees will reduce the amount of elective, non-retirement turnover, which is expensive for the agency. In April 2020, DEQ conducted an initial assessment using a Gallup survey in which 94% of the agency participated, and 42% of employees considered themselves fully engaged. A follow up survey conducted in October 2021 showed that 33% of staff considered themselves fully engaged. The decrease in employee engagement was reflected in employee turnover. DEQ saw an increase by 88% in elective, non-retirement turnover from FY2021 to FY2022.

Decreased engagement and increased turnover are influenced by a couple factors. The transition back to the office after the COVID-19 pandemic was difficult for many employees who appreciated the work-life balance of full-time telecommuting. Another contributing issue is pay in comparison to cost of living. DEQ wages are not competitive with other employers and staff report pay as a significant factor in their decision to leave DEQ. To address these issues DEQ has been working with staff on a case-by-case basis to address telecommuting arrangements to better suit needs. DEQ was also able to provide raises to all staff through CEC and used FY2022 salary savings to offer retention bonuses to existing employees and signing bonuses to new staff. In FY2023 DEQ is looking to better understand why employees stay at DEQ by conducting "stay conversations". DEQ will use the information gathered from the process to implement changes that help engage employees and retain a quality workforce.

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