



Community Partners

Program
Engineers Without Borders-USA

Project Location
Mexico

Participating Employee
Jessica Kaminsky, Chicago

CH2M HILL has partnered with Engineers Without Borders-USA (EWB-USA) since 2003. The organizations share a commitment to supporting service learning opportunities for engineering students and professionals through the implementation of sustainable engineering and construction projects in developing communities around the globe.

CH2M HILL Engineer Shares Her Experience with Engineers Without Borders-USA

While I heard about Engineers Without Borders-USA (EWB-USA) in university, my first real experience with it was when I attended an organizational meeting for the Chicagoland Professional Chapter in a beautiful old Chicago library. The idea was overwhelming; a group of strangers from Chicago, all professionals with families and careers, were going to do international engineering projects in their spare time. Three years later we have multiple projects, over 50 paid and active members, and hundreds more that get our emails, donate, and participate as they can.

The management skills that I have learned while running this organization have been invaluable. The friendships I have made, both here in Chicago and abroad in the communities we work in, have been more meaningful than I could ever have imagined.

Recently I returned from a project trip to Cuetzala de la Reforma, Mexico. Cuetzala is a small town way up in the Mexican mountains. During the dry season they have very little drinking water, and water for sanitation is virtually non-existent. With \$4,600 in help from CH2M HILL, we built a dry composting latrine at the local elementary school. We also built a rainwater catchment system on the roof of the school and connected it to a handwashing station. Now, when there is rain, the kids can wash their hands. When it is dry, they have a toilet to use that is not full of stagnant, disease bearing waste. The money CH2M HILL gave us also went to buy a water quality test kit, as the next phase of our project will try to address the lack of drinking water. Two other chapters have already asked to borrow the kit; it will be a valuable resource for the entire organization.

One of the highlights of our recent trip was an educational session we held explaining how the latrines and rain catchment system worked. One of the lessons explained how rainwater got from the sky to the spigots in the handwashing station. After we explained it, we asked each child to draw a picture showing the whole process. Everyone seemed to have fun, and we took some great photos. But we really knew how it had gone the next day when two of the kids came running up to the construction site to show us a new version of the drawing they'd made, using graph paper and a straight edge to make sure the whole thing was perfect. They were so proud to show off the drawing—and we were just as proud knowing that we had made an impact.