

## Agriculture / Weights & Measures Community Services Group

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Agricultural Commissioner/Sealer

### CSAC 2020 Challenge Award Entry

**Overview:** Provide alternative options to businesses that require a Pesticide Records or Employee Safety Inspection to reduce in person contact during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Challenge:** The San Bernardino County Department of Agriculture/Weights & Measures performs regulatory inspections to protect the environment, the public, and workers who handle and apply pesticides. In addition to inspecting actual pesticide applications, records and employee safety inspections are conducted annually for the majority of the County's pest control businesses and other entities that have employees that apply pesticides, such as agricultural growers, cities and school districts. A crucial part of the inspection process determines the business's compliance in providing the appropriate personal protective equipment to their employees and training them how to safely handle pesticides. Application and use records are also examined to determine if pesticides are being used in the proper manner and that customers are notified of what pesticide is applied and when. In March 2020, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, these mandated inspections were postponed in order to eliminate person-to-person contact and comply with State and County guidelines. As the pandemic evolved, and it became apparent that COVID-19 restrictions would be in place for at least several months, the department realized that alternative inspection methods needed to be explored.

**Solution:** The department has instituted new methods to conduct these historically in-person and on-site inspections that now limit, or eliminate, person-to-person contact. Pest control businesses and other entities are now given the opportunity to choose from a few new options to fulfill their part of the records and employee safety inspection. The options include using methods that are more traditional, for example, a business can send the required records to the Inspector by email or fax, or arrange for

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delivery/pickup; and then the inspection can be conducted over the phone. Other options include the use of computer and phone technology; businesses may opt to have a real-time inspection through Zoom, Skype or other popular cloud-based video conferencing software applications. The various software programs allow the business representative participating in the inspection to display business records and other requested documents and the Inspector is able to examine the document on the screen.

**Innovation:** The department works closely with other County Agricultural/Weights & Measures Departments throughout the State, in order to achieve common goals and objectives. County Agricultural Officers, following established State Guidelines outlined in compendiums, conduct pesticide Records and Employee Safety Inspections. Our Department did not have a need to consider innovation regarding these types of inspections until recently, when faced with the COVID-19 pandemic. We were the first County to adopt innovative inspection measures and we anticipate other Counties to follow our lead.

**Results:** For the customer, they are able to have their records and employee safety inspection completed in a low risk environment by eliminating or reducing in person contact, and beyond COVID-19, they are able to reduce travel time and spend less time away from their business. For the department, we are able to fulfill both this state mandated requirement and our annual performance measures while significantly reducing our employee's health risk. The ability to complete our 475 required annual records and employee safety inspections allows us to ensure that pest control businesses and other entities are aware of their responsibilities and, if non-compliances are found, the department is able to take corrective action.

**Replicability:** The process can be replicated with little to no cost to other California Counties (Agriculture Departments). Instructional material for video and conferencing applications is widely available and can be accessed by any department or organization.

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