

***SMALL BUSINESS ASSISTANCE OFFICE
ANNUAL REPORT
1998***

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Small Business Assistance Office (SBAO) experienced continued growth during 1998. The total number of calls received each year by the SBAO has increased steadily since it opened in early 1996, with the office logging over more than 1,200 compliance assistance requests to date.

The calls received came from a diverse group of businesses, including contractors, auto service companies, dry cleaners, printers, manufacturing companies and others. Of these calls, many were multimedia calls (covering program areas like air, waste and water), reflecting the unique challenges that small business owners face in understanding and keeping up with environmental regulations. The SBAO also conducted twelve on-site compliance visits during the year.

In addition, approximately 4,000 small businesses in Central Ohio received the SBAO's quarterly newsletter, ***The Small Business Resource***. The newsletter is a way for the SBAO to actively reach businesses with information about the environmental regulations. The SBAO developed other written compliance resources during 1998, including an "Environmental Self Assessment Guide." This guide can be used by small business owners to complete a self-check of their compliance with the environmental regulations. This resource is a popular compliance tool, with about 3,700 copies distributed during 1998.

The SBAO . . .

- Has received over 1,200 calls on its telephone hotline to date.
- Distributes its compliance newsletter *The Small Business Resource* to about 4,000 small business contacts in Central Ohio.
- Sent out about 3,700 copies of its compliance tool, *The Environmental Self Assessment Guide for Small Businesses* in 1998.
- Started conducting environmental compliance workshops for small businesses in 1998.

In mid-1998, the SBAO started conducting environmental compliance workshops for businesses. Small businesses owners can learn more about how to prepare for an Ohio EPA inspection or get an overview of Ohio's hazardous waste regulations. Four workshops were held during the year, with an average of 21 attendees at each workshop. The office is encourage by the attendance and feedback received on its workshops and plans to put more emphasis on workshops during 1999.

Networking with small business associations, mass mailings, maintaining a web site and internal marketing were some strategies used to keep businesses aware of the SBAO's services. Another key to the SBAO's success has been its continued work with an advisory committee, made up of small business owners, association representatives and Ohio EPA staff. The advisory committee provides valuable feedback and a small business perspective to the SBAO as we plan new projects.

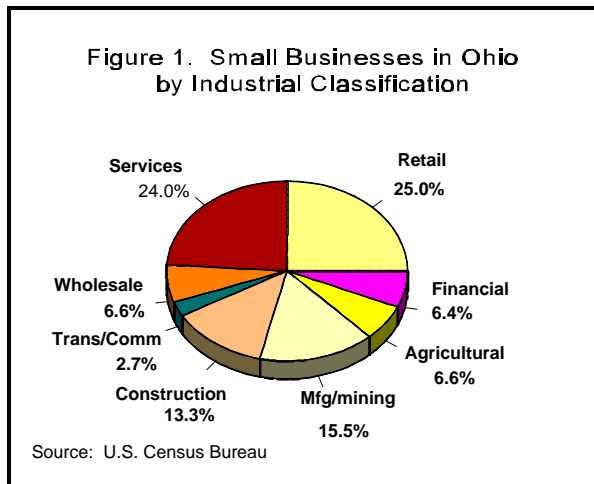
Goals for the coming year include developing additional workshops and other compliance assistance resources. It is hoped that the continued success of the SBAO during the coming year will be the catalyst for program expansion to other areas of the state. We always welcome your suggestions on how we can better serve small businesses. Please feel free to contact the office with questions or comments at 1-800-329-7518 or 614-728-8573.

Laurie Stevenson
Program Manager

INTRODUCTION

About 97 percent of the businesses in Ohio are classified as small businesses. This totals over 250,000 small business establishments, the majority of which have fewer than 20 employees. Given the scope of environmental regulations, it is not surprising that many of these small businesses are subject to some environmental regulations.

And, although small businesses want to comply with the environmental laws, they are often not aware of the rules that apply to them and how to comply. Small business owners have multiple priorities and sometimes limited resources to devote to environmental compliance. With this, it can be difficult for them to keep up with changes in the regulations.



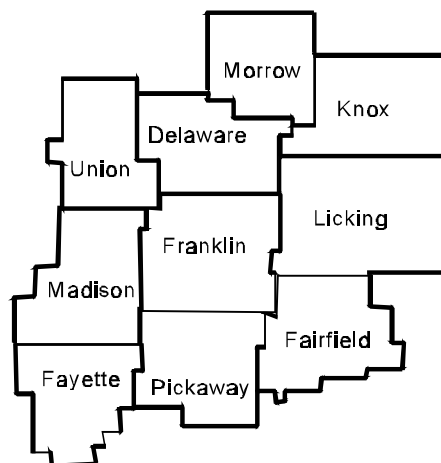
Ohio EPA's Small Business Assistance Office (SBAO) was established in 1996 to assist small businesses with their environmental compliance. The goal of the office is ***"to help small businesses understand and comply with the multimedia, environmental regulations that apply to them."***

SERVICES OF THE SBAO

The SBAO was originally established as a two-year pilot project. Services of the SBAO are currently available to small businesses with fewer than 100 employees in a 10-county Central Ohio area (See Figure 2). The main activities of the SBAO include:

- Providing telephone and on-site assistance to help small business owners understand the environmental requirements.
- Conducting workshops to help increase awareness of environmental regulations.
- Keeping a comprehensive library of environmental compliance resources for small businesses and distributing publications.
- Developing compliance assistance resources (e.g., fact sheets, brochures) that help explain the regulations in easy-to-understand language.

Figure 2. SBAO Service Area



For small businesses to feel comfortable seeking assistance, confidentiality remains a key component of the SBAO's operations. The SBAO's written confidentiality procedures specify that information provided to the office will not be turned over to Ohio EPA's inspection or enforcement staff.

SBAO Telephone Hotline (800-329-7518)

The SBAO's toll-free telephone hotline remains the most frequently used service of the office. The hotline is staffed by an environmental specialist from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

The total number of calls received each year by the SBAO has increased steadily since the office opened in early 1996 (See Figure 3). The office received 549 calls during 1998 and has logged a total of more than 1,200 compliance assistance requests to date. In addition, the SBAO is seeing a higher number of average calls per month from 1996 to 1998 as presented in Figure 4.

The majority of calls to the SBAO come from the Central Ohio area. However, the SBAO also responded to a number of calls during 1997 and 1998 from other district offices and from out-of-state (See Figure 5). Within the Central Ohio area, most of the calls during 1998 came from Franklin County. This county has the largest population of small businesses in the Central Ohio area. Additional marketing efforts during 1999 will focus on specific counties in Central Ohio where use of the SBAO has been low.

Many questions received by the office are related to a specific program area (e.g., hazardous waste regulations). Others are multimedia compliance requests from businesses who needed to know about compliance in multiple program areas (air, waste, water). Figure 5 shows the calls received in 1998 by program/media. A comparison of requests from 1997 to 1998 in this area is provided in Figure 6.

Figure 3. SBAO Compliance Assistance Requests 1996-1998

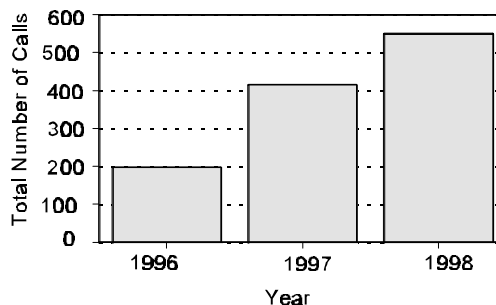


Figure 4. SBAO Hotline Calls 1996-1998 Calls Per Month

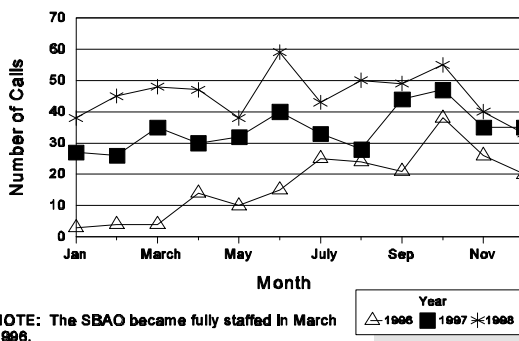


Figure 5. Compliance Assistance Requests 1997-1998 Calls Received By Area

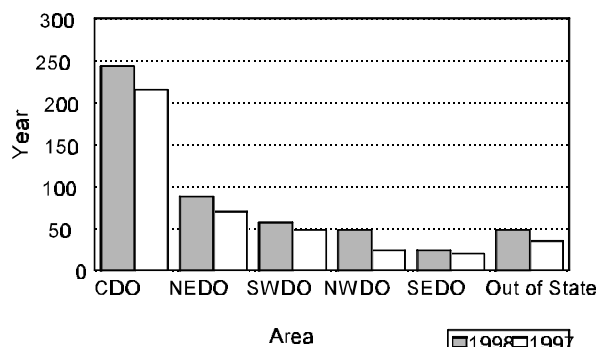
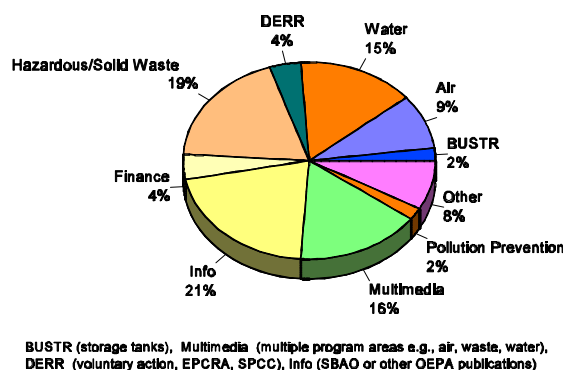


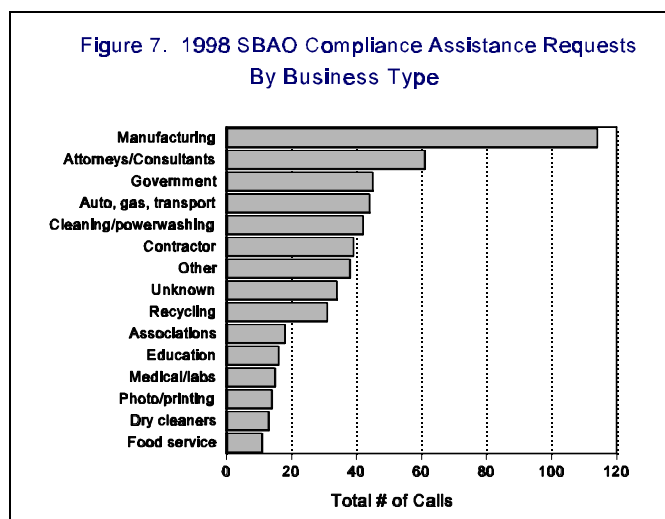
Figure 6. 1998 Compliance Assistance Requests By Media



Calls to the SBAO come from a diverse group of businesses. Figure 7 summarizes the compliance requests received in 1998 by business type. In addition to direct calls from business owners, several calls were received from other parties such as consultants, attorneys and business/trade associations - seeking information about environmental regulations for their small business customers.

On-site Compliance Assistance

The SBAO conducted twelve on-site compliance assistance visits at small businesses during 1998. Objectives for 1999 will include increased marketing of these services to businesses.



Environmental Compliance Workshops

In mid-1998, the SBAO started conducting environmental compliance workshops for businesses. Through these workshops, businesses can learn more about how to prepare for an Ohio EPA inspection or get an overview of Ohio's hazardous waste regulations. Four workshops were held during the year, with a total of 62 small business owners/employees in attendance. Feedback on the workshops is obtained by asking attendees to anonymously fill out a short questionnaire. To date, attendees have had a very positive response to the workshops. Overall, attendees have noted that the information presented is helpful to them in developing a better understanding of the regulations.

The SBAO also worked with trade associations, including participating in meetings of the Carpet Cleaners Association and Power Washers Association of North America. At each, the SBAO (working with the EPA's Division of Surface Water) provided an overview of the Ohio EPA regulations and compliance requirements. The office is hoping to develop similar working relationships with other small business trade associations during 1999.

The SBAO also actively participates as an exhibitor at a number of small business events during the year, using each event as an opportunity to distribute compliance assistance materials. Some of the key events during 1998 included:

- Small Business Day at the Capitol
- 1998 Printing & Graphics Expo
- Ohio Chamber of Commerce Annual Meeting
- Petroleum Marketers Association Meeting/Expo
- Business & Industry Symposium (Columbus, Ohio)
- Ohio Environmental Health Association Annual Conference

Printed Materials

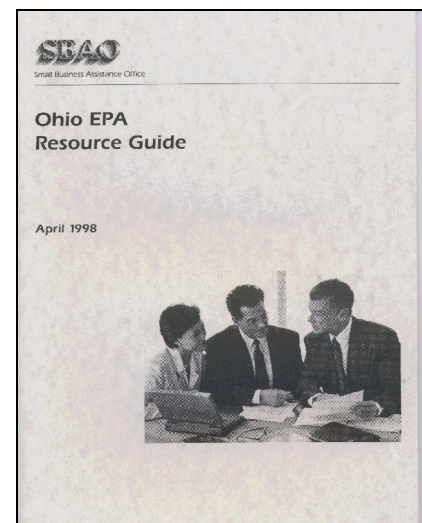
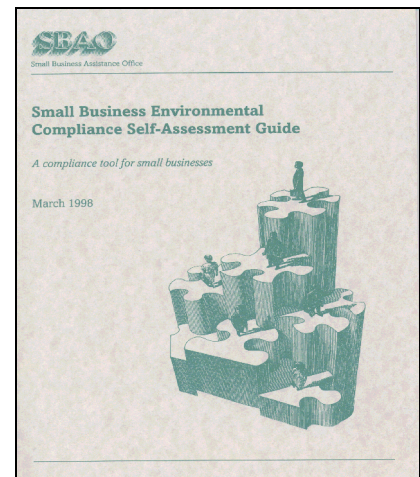
The SBAO continued to collect materials and update its technical resource library during 1998. The office strives to obtain easy-to-understand regulatory guidance documents and fact sheets that can be distributed to small businesses. A highlight of 1998 was the completion of the SBAO's "Environmental Compliance Self-Assessment Guide for Small Businesses." This guide can be used by small business owners to complete a self-check of their compliance with the environmental regulations. This resource is a popular compliance tool, with over 3,700 copies distributed during 1998.

The office also put together the Ohio EPA Resource Guide. This guide includes general information about the operations of Ohio EPA. In addition, it describes the many resources available for businesses, including technical contacts, newsletters, instructions on getting regulations, web sites and financial resources. About 2,000 copies of this guide were distributed during 1998 and the SBAO is anticipating an update and reprint of this publication in 1999.

The SBAO also developed other compliance resources during the year such as fact sheets and booklets. In addition, the SBAO published three additional issues of its newsletter, *The Small Business Resource*. The SBAO uses each issue to update small businesses on the development of Ohio EPA guidance and rules. In addition, the newsletter is used as an educational tool, with each issue covering a topic related to air, waste and water regulations. Each

The SBAO distributes its newsletter, ***The Small Business Resource***, to about 4,000 small business contacts in Central Ohio.

issue highlights pollution prevention opportunities for small businesses. SBAO received several requests from trade groups for permission to reprint *Resource* articles.



Web Site

The SBAO maintains a web site at www.epa.ohio.gov/other/sbao/sbaindex.html which received over 5,000 hits during 1998. To date, all of the fact sheets, information sheets and newsletters published by the SBAO have been posted on the web site. In addition, the SBAO has posted other compliance resources developed by other divisions or by U.S. EPA. Small business owners can now order the SBAO's publications directly on-line.

SBAO Advisory Committee

Another key to the SBAO's success has been its continued work with an advisory committee, made up of small business owners, association representatives and Ohio EPA staff. The advisory committee evaluates the SBAO's marketing efforts and peer reviews guidance documents and newsletters developed by the office. The advisory committee continues to be a valuable source of feedback and provides the SBAO with a small business perspective on its program planning activities.

MARKETING

The SBAO continued its marketing efforts during 1998 to maintain awareness of the office. Several different marketing strategies were used, including:

- Direct mailings of SBAO brochures, newsletters and compliance resources;
- SBAO display booth at small business functions (expos, conferences, trade shows); and
- Maintaining an internet web site;
- Completing presentations at small business events and association meetings

MEASUREMENT AND CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

The SBAO uses surveys as one method of gaining feedback on its services. Following receipt of a call, a customer feedback comment card is usually sent along with any information mailed. These postage-paid comment cards remain a convenient way for small businesses to provide information to the SBAO on its services. The office has also developed a short survey form that accompanies its self assessment guide. In addition, the office distributes a questionnaire to attendees of its compliance workshops.

In general, small businesses have provided favorable feedback to the office in terms of timeliness, responsiveness of staff and helpfulness of resources. The surveys are an important tool to the SBAO in identifying additional compliance assistance needs and areas where its services can be improved. The SBAO will continue to explore ways of soliciting the opinions and feedback from small businesses during 1999.

GOALS

The SBAO is currently working on goals and objectives for 1999. Based on a review of performance for the past year, it is anticipated that SBAO activities for the coming year will include:

- Focus marketing efforts on counties in Central Ohio area not receiving a high degree of calls
- Increase marketing of on-site compliance assistance services;
- Continue to develop compliance assistance tools, including industry specific materials (where needed);
- Develop additional workshop materials (collaborating with other OEPA divisions if possible).

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