I had the pleasure to intern with Summit County Environmental from June through July 2016. This eight-week experience was part of the National Environmental Public Health Internship Program (NEPHIP) run through the NEHA and AEHAP with CDC sponsorship. Working with four other environmental health professional, two of them CSU grads, I was able to experience what it means to conduct local-level public health. With their office based in Frisco, I lived and worked in the heart of the Rocky Mountains for two months, working to better the health of the community.

I worked in four main areas as part of my internship: food safety, pool and spas, radon mitigation, and water quality. I utilized the FDA’s online food safety training to update my skills so that I could assist at the many temporary food events, like farmer’s markets and festivals, which occur up in the county every summer. This was in addition to joining in on regular food inspections through the area all summer and helping examine HACCP plans for at-risk foods.

As a response to previous safety concerns about its effectiveness, the county deemed that hydrogen peroxide should no longer be considered a disinfectant for pool and hot tubs and asked for its removal from all community water features. My role was to contact several hundred of the housing and condominium associations in the county to determine if they were using hydrogen peroxide and help determine ways to convince them to change.

Communication was also essential in finding out more information about radon mitigation in the county. As the second leading cause of lung cancer after smoking, radon is a unique and dangerous risk to the public’s health. Summit County had been offering free radon test kits since 2011 and I endeavored to survey those who had high levels of radon to know whether or not they mitigated and found that nearly 70% of people had mitigated.

Like my initial classes in EH, I conducted water sample testing, mainly for nitrates. I used twenty years’ worth of data to determine if certain neighborhoods in the county were seeing concerning levels or increases of nitrates, a sign that the sewer system might need expansion there.

Most importantly I went out in the field to learn about regulation and construction of septic systems, inspecting child care facilities, managing public health crises such as a foodborne illness outbreak, and educating the community about environmental health.

This internship gave me an opportunity to see and understand what it takes to manage the health of community. I experienced a location I had never spent much time in, met some amazing and dedicated people, and had the chance to make a difference in protecting public health. If you want to intern and keep a local community safe from risk consider a county level health department, and what better place than beautiful, mountainous Summit County.