

E-connect

A bi-monthly update on Environment Canterbury people and their activities.

For vacancies at Environment Canterbury visit: www.ecan.govt.nz
If you would like to be taken off our database list, please email econnect@ecan.govt.nz

July 2011

The recent earthquakes in Canterbury have been challenging for employers. With many inner city buildings off-limits, finding safe premises for staff and customers has been a priority. Until February most staff working for Environment Canterbury in Christchurch were based at its Kilmore Street offices; three-connected buildings and the neighboring Spicers building that now can't be accessed due to a nearby hotel that is earthquake-damaged.

Environment Canterbury has responded by dividing staff into the directorates they work and relocating groups across, and just outside, the city. While some teams have shifted to offices within less-affected Christchurch suburbs, others are operating from rural towns on the outskirts. Working remotely, from home and from the field with a laptop, is now the norm, and Environment Canterbury staff are finding new and clever ways of keeping in touch and meeting customer needs.

Environment Canterbury is working hard to look after its staff to ensure they have the resources and flexibility to get the best out of their new working arrangements. We talk to two staff about their experiences post-quake and look at how the Canterbury Management Strategy has maintained momentum amongst today's uncertainties.

Kate Lewis

Kate Lewis's colleague recently helped her shovel silt off her driveway. Helping each other deal with the reality of liquefaction is the kind of team she has, she says. "Everyone works together really well."

Kate is Team Leader of the Coordination Team in the Resource Management Group at Environment Canterbury. Working with landowners, individuals and industry sectors, the team promotes sustainable land management in Canterbury.

Since February team members have worked from home, out in the field and from a temporary office at Middleton. Recently Kate's team moved to another temporary office at Gillespie Hall at Lincoln University. The reception they received blew her away. "I'm amazed at how friendly and welcoming everyone has been; the café, student cafeteria staff, recreation centre staff, everyone around the Lincoln campus has been really nice and it's given us a taste of what it's like to work out of the city."

To make the approx 20km commute easier, team members are carpooling where possible and only regularly meet Wednesdays at the campus. The rest of the week the seven staff head out in the field, work in other offices or from home. Environment Canterbury bought laptops for the group and Kate says it's appreciated. "People are enjoying the flexibility to work from home and being able to access all of their files. We can go straight out into the field and it's easier to meet with external customers."

While the challenges are still there, Kate says staff are committed to delivering as good a service as before the earthquakes. "As a team we are very passionate about what we do. There's quite a strong desire to do the right thing by our customers."

While some work was delayed after the September quake, most of rural Canterbury has been less affected by ongoing earthquakes. So the team is constantly assessing with staff and customers what work can go ahead and what needs to be put off. "We're re-evaluating some of our urban work and seeing whether it is appropriate to engage with people. In the rural area, things are going ahead pretty much as planned."

One of the more positive aspects of the recent crisis has been the adaptability staff have shown, says Kate. "You learn to be a bit more flexible and it's good that some new ways of working are being explored."



Kate and her team digging liquefaction after the June 2011 earthquake

Craig Prebble

Learning to be flexible has been a necessity for Craig Prebble who works in Environment Canterbury's Finance team. Since the February earthquake Craig's team has relocated three times. Previously based in the inner city, Craig and his 14 Finance team colleagues now work from the historic surroundings of the Ellesmere Country Club.

Philosophical about his new workplace, Craig says Environment Canterbury staff, like the rest of Christchurch, are learning to cope with change.

"It's disruptive to a degree but everyone is managing quite well. Things take a bit longer to get done because staff are at different sites. But most of our customers seem pretty receptive to that."

Getting used to rural surroundings is not Craig's only adjustment. Living at Kaiapoi, a town on the northern side of Christchurch, now means a 45 minute commute, where previously travel to work took 20 minutes. But carpooling with a colleague has eased the burden. "It's going pretty good, we're both pretty relaxed."

Craig is currently acting Accounts Officer Payable, a new position he took on following February's earthquake. As a father of three boys he's very aware of the need to look after his family, but says Environment Canterbury has put in place a range of measures to ensure staff and their families cope with the aftershocks.

"Environment Canterbury has been very accommodating when people need a little time here and there for other things. They have looked after us. Some of our staff have worked from home and management has been good at supporting staff."

As far as the organisation goes, Craig says Environment Canterbury still has a lot to offer.

"I'm quite happy as it's a great place to work. As far as the future of where we are situated, that's something that they are still working through. You do what you need to do at times like this; you go with the flow."



Craig Prebble standing on the deck outside the Ellesmere Centre, April 2011

CWMS Team Grows

One of the highest profile work areas for Environment Canterbury is the Canterbury Water Management Strategy (CWMS).

Working under the brand 'Canterbury Water', the strategy marks a huge shift in how Environment Canterbury and the wider regional community manage water resources. It provides a shared vision – developed over many years via extensive public consultation – to enable present and future generations to gain the greatest benefit from Canterbury's water resources within an environmentally sustainable framework.

Director Strategy and Programmes, Jill Atkinson, says that there is a lot of community, stakeholder and Government interest in the progress being made in implementing the strategy and the CWMS team is totally focussed on getting it right.

Progressing the strategy in the midst of earthquakes and several changes of management has been a big ask for the team; a number of whom have suffered earthquake damage to homes. Their commitment and dedication "has been incredible", says Jill. "Trying to ensure workloads remain manageable given their personal circumstances has been a challenge."

But in the past month four new positions have been advertised and interviews are underway. The team is looking forward to having additional resources available to keep up the momentum. The first Zone Implementation Programme (ZIP) for one area of Canterbury (Hurunui-Waiiau) has been released and the last two of the ten Zone Committees are in the process of being established.

The original two facilitators have been joined by three others. Additionally, two Tangata Whenua facilitators have been employed. Their role, to support papatipu runanga participation in and understanding of the CWMS, is a first for the organisation and demonstrates the significance Environment Canterbury places on its partnership with Ngai Tahu. A new Programme Director CWMS will be appointed this month following the resignation of the incumbent, Jenn Bestwick.

"This role is a key external face for the CWMS and will also provide strong leadership to the team." says Jill.

Despite the challenges, the CWMS team is going places. With the support of the entire organisation they are determined to deliver on the huge expectation of community management of water resources in Canterbury. For Jill, one of the most satisfying moments was at a recent public consultation meeting at Oxford where a farmer said "I came here expecting to have a fight but what is being proposed looks really good - I have got nothing to fight about." We have a long way to go but the CWMS team is making a great start.

For more information on Canterbury Water check out www.ecan.govt.nz/get-involved/canterburywater



Northern coastline, 2010

Where are Environment Canterbury staff now based?

Finance and Corporate Services: Ellesmere Centre, Lincoln

Strategy and Programmes: Allied Telesis building, Nazareth Avenue, Middleton

Resource Management: Gillespie Hall, Lincoln University

Investigating & Monitoring: divided between Gillespie Hall, Nazareth Ave and NIWA

Operations: Northlands and depots outside city

Planning & Consents:

Planning working from Nazareth Ave and Consents working from AgResearch premises, Lincoln

Commissioners, Chief Executive, Communications and Marketing and HR: Ellesmere Centre, Lincoln

For vacancies at Environment Canterbury visit: www.ecan.govt.nz

Everything is connected