

*SMALL BUSINESS ASSISTANCE OFFICE*

*ANNUAL REPORT  
1997*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Small Business Assistance Office (SBAO) experienced continued success of its pilot program during 1997. Since opening early in 1996, the SBAO has logged a total of 635 compliance assistance requests. Of this total, the office received 415 compliance requests during 1997 alone. This represents an exciting increase in requests of almost 100 percent from 1996 to 1997.

Many calls received reflect the unique challenges that small business owners face in understanding and keeping up with environmental regulations. Requests for assistance came from a diverse group of small businesses, including contractors, auto service companies, dry cleaners, printers, manufacturing companies and others.

Although the hotline remains the most widely used service of the SBAO, the office did receive requests for on-site compliance assistance, conducting ten on-site visits during the year. During the year, 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. Besides the newsletter, developing other compliance resources such as fact sheets was another major activity of the SBAO this year.

Contributing to the success of the office was the SBAO's active marketing campaign. Networking with small business associations, mass mailings, maintaining a web site and internal marketing were some strategies used to increase awareness 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 continued marketing and developing more compliance assistance resources. The SBAO is considering an industry-specific outreach effort during the year. In addition, the SBAO will be considering other methods of compliance assistance such as holding compliance workshops.

It is hoped that the continued success of the SBAO during the coming year will be the catalyst for future 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

Approximately 97 percent or over 250,000 businesses in Ohio are classified as small businesses. Many of these small businesses are subject to some environmental regulations. A summary of small businesses by industry classification is provided in Figure 1.

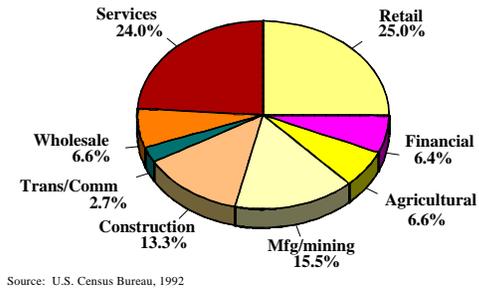
As shown in Figure 2, most small businesses in Ohio have fewer than 20 employees. Although many small businesses want to comply with the environmental laws, they are often not aware of the rules that apply to them and how to comply. Small business owners have multiple priorities and sometimes limited resources to devote to environmental compliance. With this, it can be difficult for them to keep up with changes in the regulations.

## OVERVIEW OF THE SBAO

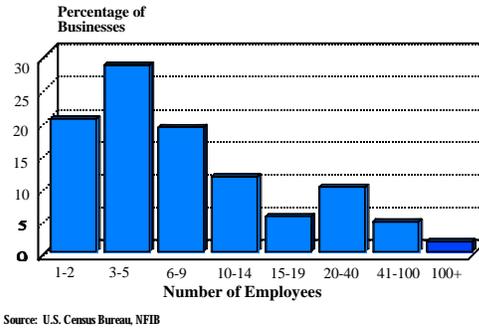
Services of the SBAO are available to small businesses with fewer than 100 employees in a 10-county Central Ohio area (See Figure 3). The goal of the office is:

*"to help small businesses understand and comply with the multimedia, environmental regulations that apply to them."*

**Figure 1: Small Businesses in Ohio by Industry Classification**



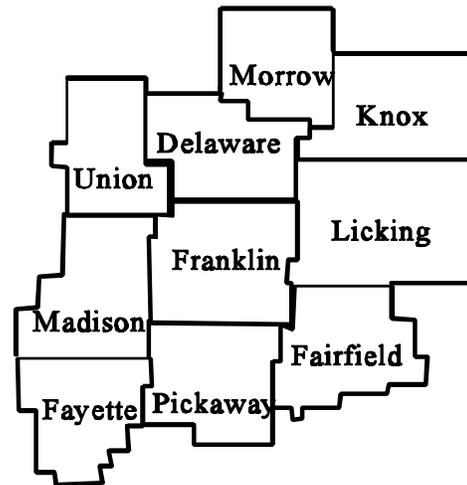
**Figure 2: Small Businesses in Ohio by Number of Employees**



To meet this goal, the main activities of the SBAO include:

- Providing telephone and on-site assistance to help small business owners understand the environmental requirements and the measures needed to stay in compliance.
- Participating in small business related seminars and conferences to help increase awareness of environmental regulations.
- Maintaining a library of environmental compliance resources for small businesses.
- Developing compliance assistance resources (e.g., fact sheets, brochures) that help explain the regulations in easy-to-understand language.

Figure 3. 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)*

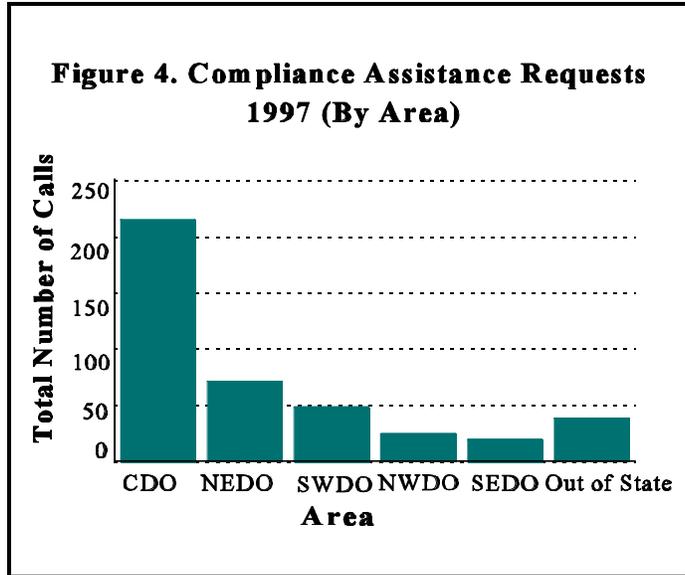
Small businesses seek quick access to information and timely answers to questions. The SBAO's toll-free telephone hotline remains the most frequently used service of the office. The office has an environmental specialist on the hotline from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Average response time of the SBAO during 1997 was 3.5 days from date of call to date of mailing information.

During 1997, 415 calls were logged - an average of about 35 calls per month. The majority of calls came from the Central Ohio area. However, the SBAO also responded to a number of calls from outside the pilot project area. The SBAO also received requests from out of state. Many requests were received by prospective business owners, interested in starting business in Ohio. Most out-of-state inquiries were related to permitting and other Ohio EPA requirements necessary for business start-up. Most of the out-of-state requests came to the office through the SBAO's web site. (See Figure 4)

Within the pilot project area, most of the calls during 1997 came from Franklin County. This county has the largest population of small businesses in the pilot project area. Other areas using the SBAO include Licking, Fairfield and Delaware counties. Marketing efforts during 1998 will include targeting the specific counties where use of the SBAO has been low.

Calls to the SBAO during 1997 came from many types of businesses. Table 5 summarizes the compliance requests received by business type. As shown, several calls received from the SBAO were not direct business calls. Some of these calls came from other parties such as attorneys and other agencies (e.g., Small Business Development Centers) seeking information about environmental regulations for their small business customers. The category of "other" business types includes miscellaneous operations such as funeral homes, churches, campgrounds, educational institutions, agricultural operations, etc.



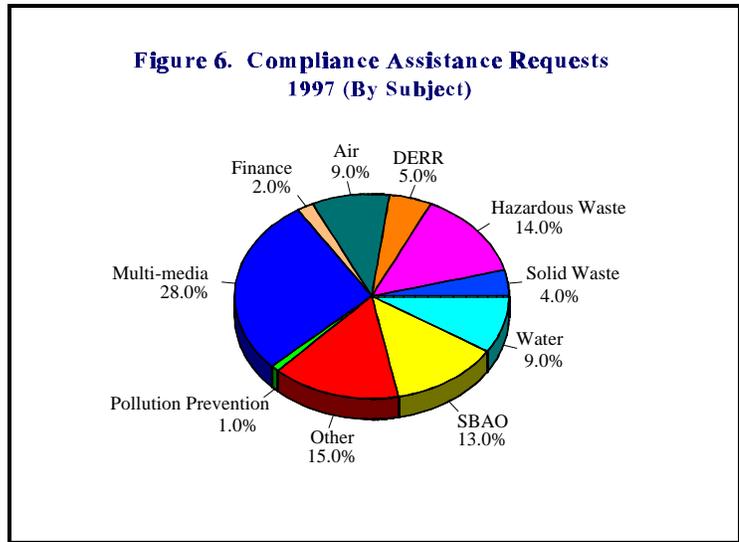
**Table 5. Compliance Assistance Requests 1997 (by business type)**

<i>Type of Business</i>	<i>% of Total Calls Received</i>
Manufacturing (plastic, chemical, rubber, metal)	16 %
Other (see narrative)	16 %
Government (other agencies, SBDCs, chambers)	14 %
Consultants	9 %
Auto (service, collision repair)	7 %
Contractors (HVAC, power washing, painting, wood)	7 %
Unknown (business type not specified)	7 %
Recycling	5 %
Vendors	4 %
Business Associations (trade groups)	3 %
Attorneys	3 %
Food Service	2 %
Printing/Photo	2 %
Dry Cleaning	2 %
Labs/Medical/Veterinary Clinics	2 %

Many questions received by the office were related to a specific program area (e.g., hazardous waste regulations). Others were multimedia compliance requests from businesses who needed to know about compliance in all program areas (air, waste, water). See Figure 6.

Approximately 66 percent of the incoming calls during 1997 were from existing businesses and 34 percent from new businesses. The SBAO is encouraged by the proportion of new business calls received during the year. Getting information to a new business on environmental regulations can

increase the possibility of long-term compliance. In addition, working with new business owners helps break down the fear barriers they face in contacting the agency. After working with new businesses in a non-regulatory capacity, the SBAO has received repeat calls from a number of these business owners who feel increasingly comfortable using the office as a technical resource.



#### *On-site Compliance Assistance*

The SBAO conducted ten on-site compliance assistance visits and three internal compliance assistance meetings with small businesses during 1997. Objectives for 1998 will include increased marketing of these services to businesses.

## **OUTREACH**

The SBAO used the Internet, compliance workshops, newsletters and other printed materials to actively reach small businesses with environmental compliance information during 1997.

#### *Workshops*

The SBAO participated in several seminars during 1997 to provide small businesses with information on Ohio EPA's regulations and compliance assistance resources. The SBAO participated in Envirofest, the statewide Inland Spills Conference, two Manufacturers' Education Council seminars and Small Business Day at the Capitol. In addition, the SBAO partnered with the National Federation of Independent Business and Small Business Development Center on environmental workshops.

The SBAO participated as an exhibitor at several events to distribute compliance information to businesses. These events included:

- Envirofest Seminar,
- Ohio Environmental Health Association State Meeting,
- Lancaster/Fairfield County Solid Waste Expo,
- Ohio Petroleum Marketers Association Expo,
- Small Business Day at the Capitol,
- Minority Business Expo,
- SBDC/City of Columbus Trade Fair,
- Columbus Small Business Expo,
- Ohio Development Association State Meeting,
- Development Committee for Central Ohio Annual Meeting, and
- Small Business Development Center Annual Meeting.

#### *Printed Materials*

The SBAO continued to collect materials and update its technical resource library during 1997. The office strives to obtain easy-to-understand regulatory guidance documents and fact sheets that can be distributed to small businesses.

The SBAO's activities during the year also included developing environmental compliance tools (fact sheets, brochures, information sheets) for small businesses. Often, these projects were collaborative efforts between the SBAO and other divisions of the agency. Projects completed during 1997 included:

- Getting Copies of Ohio EPA's Regulations (fact sheet/order form),
- Getting Ohio EPA's Newsletters (information sheet/subscription form),
- Carpet Cleaning and Environmental Regulations (fact sheet),
- Environmental Laws (fact sheet),
- Mobile Power Washing and Environmental Regulations (fact sheet),
- Environmental Compliance Assistance Resources for Small Businesses (information sheet),
- Central Ohio Environmental Compliance Resources (telephone list),
- Preparing Your Business for an Ohio EPA Inspection (brochure), and
- Selecting a TSD Facility to Handle Your Hazardous Waste (fact sheet).

During 1997, the SBAO published two additional issues of its newsletter, *The Small Business Resource*. A fifth issue is scheduled for distribution in early 1998. 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 issue highlights pollution prevention opportunities for small businesses.

The SBAO distributed a copy of its quarterly newsletter, *The Small Business Resource*, to approximately 4,000 small businesses and small business associations.

The SBAO received several requests from trade groups for permission to reprint *Resource* articles in their own newsletters. This exchange of information has been an encouraging development during 1997.

#### *Web Site*

The SBAO maintains a web site at [www.epa.ohio.gov/other/sbao/sbaindex.html](http://www.epa.ohio.gov/other/sbao/sbaindex.html) which received close to 5,000 hits during 1997. 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.

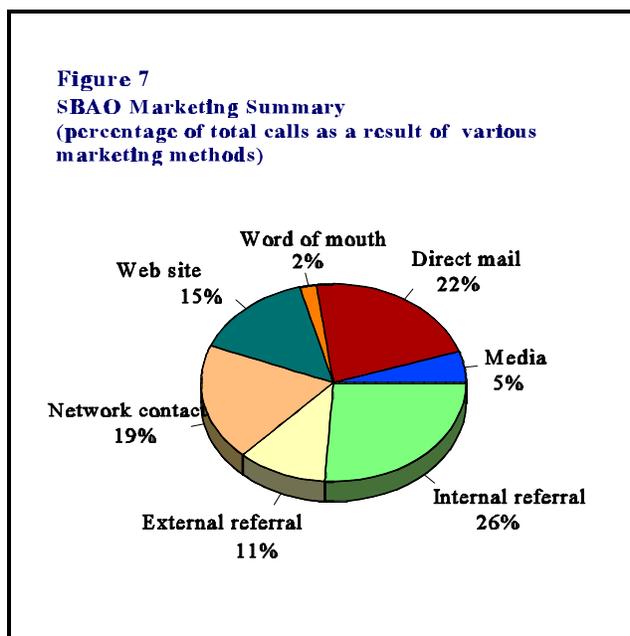
Having these resources available through the web site is a convenient and quick way for businesses to reach compliance information. As discussed in the marketing section of this report, approximately 15 percent of incoming requests for assistance came through the SBAO's Internet web site. With growing usage of the Internet by small businesses, continuous updating of the site will be a goal of the office for 1998.

## MARKETING

The SBAO continued its marketing efforts during 1997 to increase the awareness of the office. Several different marketing strategies were used, including:

- Submitting articles about the SBAO to local trade journals and small business publications;
- Networking with small business associations and agencies (e.g., Chambers, Rotary Clubs, NFIB, Small Business Development Center, Dept. of Development, other state agencies, etc.);
- Direct mailings of SBAO brochures, newsletters and compliance resources;
- SBAO exhibits at small business functions (expos, conferences, trade shows);
- Maintaining an Internet web site; and
- Internal networking to keep other Ohio EPA divisions aware of SBAO activities.

The SBAO completed 24 presentations at various Agency and small business association meetings to share information and market the services of the office. In addition, the office sponsored a display booth at 14 different small business events during 1997. Developing these networks remains an important marketing strategy for the SBAO. Figure 7 shows the percentage of calls received as a result of various marketing methods.



## **SBAO ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

The SBAO continued to meet with its advisory committee during 1997. 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. Continued meetings with the committee and possible expansion to include new members are goals for 1998.

## **MEASUREMENT AND CUSTOMER FEEDBACK**

During 1997, the SBAO sent customer feedback comment cards out with each information package. These postage-paid comment cards remain a convenient way for small businesses to provide information to the SBAO on its services. All comment cards returned during 1997 provided favorable feedback to the office in terms of timeliness, responsiveness of staff and helpfulness of resources.

## **GOALS**

The SBAO is currently working on goals and objectives for 1998. 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 pilot project area not receiving a high degree of calls. (e.g., chambers, rotary clubs, local advertising, media spots, etc.) and increase marketing of on-site compliance assistance services;
- Continue to develop compliance assistance tools, including finalization of environmental compliance self-assessment guide; and
- Consider/investigate an industry-specific sector initiative (collaboration with Office of Pollution Prevention or other divisions possible).