

2009 Innovations Awards Program APPLICATION

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ID # (assigned by CSG): 09-E-14RI

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: Rhode Island

Program Category: Natural Resources, Agriculture

1. Program name.

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management Agriculture Product Registration

2. Administering agency.

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM), Division of Agriculture

3. Contact person.

Mr. Eugene Pepper, Senior Environmental Scientist, RI DEM.

4. Address

235 Promenade Street, Rm. 370, Providence, RI 02908-5767

5. Telephone Number.

401-222-2781 x4501

6. Fax number.

401-222-6047

7. E-mail address.

eugene.pepper@dem.ri.gov

8. Web site address.Agency: <http://www.dem.ri.gov>Application: www.ri.gov/DEM/agriculture**9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.**

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management Agriculture Product Registration online application allows companies to complete annual renewals for all agriculture products currently registered with DEM. The application is available twenty-four hours a day, takes minutes to complete, offers secure payment options and an immediate registration certificate upon completion.

10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)?

DEM approached Rhode Island Interactive, the state's official Web site and service third-party provider, to design and develop an application for product renewals. The application first went live in November, 2005. An application redesign took place in 2008, resulting in an improved, more robust version that went live August, 2008 – and it is this site, www.ri.gov/DEM/agriculture, being submitted for the 2009 Innovation Awards.

11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?

The online application was created to make the renewal process more convenient for agriculture product manufacturers and more efficient for DEM staff.

Agriculture products include feeds, fertilizers, soil amendments, liming materials, and pesticides. Historically, each of these product types was renewed through a lengthy paper process. DEM would mail renewal packages to all manufacturers for each product currently registered with the Department. The companies would then prepare the necessary documentation and return the package (again, via postal mail), including a corresponding check to cover renewal costs.

The program was created to make the renewal process more convenient for companies by allowing them to visit the [online service](#) and select or enter the products to be renewed and pay for the renewals by credit card or [eCheck](#). DEM wanted to spare the companies time spent preparing the hard-copy renewal documentation, and [save](#) companies the expense of shipping the documents to Rhode Island, while allowing them to pay for the exact amount calculated on the site – mitigating the risk of sending a check for the wrong total amount.

The application was also developed to expedite and improve DEM's internal processes. In 2008, due to retirements and attrition, DEM recognized that there was not sufficient staff to prepare, manage, and administer the process by paper. DEM was concerned that renewals could not be processed or returned in a timely fashion. The online application was designed to alleviate the challenges of program administration for DEM.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

Annually, letters are sent in early October to all companies with agriculture products currently registered with DEM. When companies receive the letter, a representative can immediately visit the online service URL to begin the renewal transaction.

Customers enter their DEM-assigned identification number, and Rhode Island Interactive authenticates the company's valid identity against a file provided by DEM. Customers then select the types of products they would like to renew, enter product information, and select their payment method.

Once payment is complete, customers instantly receive a detailed receipt with a list of all products registered. The receipt serves as their proof of registration for that year.

Rhode Island Interactive sends a nightly update of completed transactions to DEM, and this information is applied to the DEM backend database. The renewal process is complete once the information is transferred to DEM.

Rhode Island Interactive sends a weekly remittance of funds to DEM based on the standard Rhode Island Interactive/state of Rhode Island procedures and agreements.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

We believe Rhode Island is the first state to develop a state-designed, state-administered, comprehensive Web application for agriculture product renewals.

14. What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

No DEM funds or taxpayer dollars were spent to develop the online service. All development, design and hosting costs were assumed by Rhode Island Interactive. Rhode Island Interactive is the state's official Web provider, and is responsible for RI.gov, the state's Web home page, and over 100 online services

currently available in Rhode Island. Rhode Island Interactive is a wholly owned, Providence-based subsidiary of the eGovernment firm NIC (NASDAQ: EGOV).

Rhode Island Interactive began a partnership with the state of Rhode Island in 2001, under a zero-dollar contract. Rhode Island Interactive's operations are supported entirely by nominal enhanced access fees associated with some Rhode Island Interactive online services.

Due to Rhode Island Interactive's unique funding model, the exact startup costs of any given application are not determined. All project management, design, development, hosting and marketing are offered at no cost to the state. This is true of all services provided. The state is Rhode Island Interactive's only client, and therefore, the company strives to provide as many services as possible, across all agencies. Specific hours and rates are not tracked.

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

Operational costs are not estimated by Rhode Island Interactive, as ongoing customer service, hosting, and application modifications are also provided at no cost to the state.

There is no ongoing, annual operational cost for DEM beyond the staff time allocated to this program as part of their regular job assignments.

16. How is the program funded?

The ongoing costs to administer the renewal program are derived from enhanced access fees associated with online product transactions. The fees range from \$1 - \$5 per product. Funds generated support the above-referenced customer service and modifications to the application; additionally, these funds help support Rhode Island Interactive's operation in Rhode Island.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

No legislation changes were necessary. DEM does require that all companies renew online, but mandatory participation was determined through rulemaking processes internal to the Department.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

Rhode Island Interactive leverages the equipment, technology and software already in use for various state agencies and Web applications. This technology includes servers at an off-site, secure data center to host the application.

Rhode Island Interactive provides all renewal information to the Department of Environmental Management via nightly batch process. The batch automatically updates the legacy DEM backed database. DEM staff can then access and query all renewal information, and update this information, through their traditional processes.

No new equipment, technology or software was purchased to administer this online application.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

To the best of our knowledge, Rhode Island is the first states to offer a state-administered online renewal application for agriculture products. The Department of Environmental Management approached Rhode Island Interactive with the project idea and partnered with the Rhode Island Interactive team to develop and create a solution.

DEM's Division of Agriculture spearheaded the innovation. Senior Environmental Scientist Eugene Pepper was the DEM project lead. He can be reached at 401-222-2781 x4501, by email at eugene.pepper@dem.ri.gov, or by postal mail at 235 Promenade Street, Rm. 370, Providence, RI 02908.

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

Though almost every state requires agriculture products to be registered with state officials in some capacity, Rhode Island is unique in offering a fully automated renewal process.

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

Yes, the program is fully implemented and is intended to handle all renewals in 2010.

23. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

The online renewal program has benefitted agriculture product manufacturers by making the process more convenient and by offering immediate registration certifications. Companies no longer wait days or weeks for notification. Once they complete the online application, they can immediately consider their products registered for the upcoming year.

The program has also saved DEM employees hours previously devoted to data-entry and preparing mailings, and allowed DEM to concentrate on other responsibilities such as ensuring product safety and enforcement. During the 2009 renewal cycle, Rhode Island Interactive accommodated over 1,100 companies registering over 14,200 products. Over \$2 million was collected and automatically remitted to the state – revenue that otherwise would've been sent by paper check, reconciled, deposited, and vouchered in the state accounting system by DEM employees.

The online application program has also spared the use of reams of paper traditionally associated with the renewal process. A brief letter to companies and a one-sheet renewal receipt are the only papers exchanged in this process, meaning notable environmental benefits were realized, as well.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

In November 2005, the online renewal service was first launched, but participation was not mandatory. Adoption rates were low – there was no significant marketing or educational effort associated with the new service, and companies weren't sufficiently motivated to abandon their traditional methods of completing RI renewals. [The application did produce an immediate confirmation, and users suggested the fee schedule was hard to follow.](#)

DEM recognized, in early 2008, that the renewal process was not sustainable – there were not enough companies utilizing the online service, and DEM did not have the staff necessary to complete the paper renewals in a timely fashion.

DEM approached Rhode Island Interactive in early 2008 with the idea of making the online service mandatory, and at the same time, improving the user experience.

Following analysis of the business processes, as well as updates and changes, the application was redesigned. The new application allows users to complete renewals in fewer steps, and no longer requires electronic submission of product labels. [Users receive immediate confirmation of their renewals and the fee schedule is less complicated.](#)

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

From a technology perspective, states must have the resources to create a Web service for the submission of renewal information, and the ability to create and administer secure online payment processing. States must also determine how information collected via Web service will be successfully passed to a state or vendor database where this information is stored.

From a business process perspective, states must review all legislation, rules and regulations to ensure that online renewals can be accommodated. States must also determine if the process will be optional or mandatory. Though mandatory participation yielded hesitation from the participating manufacturers, the results were consistently positive and feedback was generally good. Without mandatory participation, a risk exists that adoption will be low, and the cost to develop or administer the program will outweigh the time-savings benefits.