



U.S. ARMY EUROPE AND AFRICA
ENVIRONMENTAL BRANCH
2026 AWARDS NOMINATION -
NARRATIVE

Category: Environmental Quality (Individual/Team)

2026 SECRETARY OF THE ARMY ENVIRONMENTAL AWARDS

Introduction

The United States Army Europe and Africa (USAREUR-AF) Environmental Branch (ENV), within the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, Engineer (ODCSENG) supports one of the largest areas of responsibility (AOR), spanning three continents and over 100 countries, and some of the most dynamic operational missions in the Army today, namely, the defense of Europe and the deterrence of Russian aggression following the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Because of this and the subsequent war, the Army's mission in Europe (and frankly, defense posture among European nations) has fundamentally shifted toward large-scale, mobile, and multinational operations to support Ukraine, strengthen the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) eastern flank, and increase interoperability. This transformation has brought a surge of tens of thousands of rotational units deployed annually to the theater, an increase in number and scale of multilateral exercises, and greater variation in sites and nations hosting US forces.

ENV is responsible for environmental management at 30+ non-garrison installations, including forward operating sites, cooperative security locations, contingency locations, and dynamic operation and exercise sites. These locations are outside the purview of the Army's Installation Management Command (IMCOM) and thus do not have dedicated environmental staff on-site; ENV acts as the reachback installation staff. This mission places the ENV team at the forefront of an interesting challenge – installation environmental management from another country without an installation framework as the Theater Army environmental proponent. As the mission has grown, they have adapted swiftly and effectively to provide consistent support across echelon. From developing policy as this Theater Army Environmental Office to streamlining hazardous waste management and spill response for units deployed around the theater, the team has enabled sustained readiness and interoperability among NATO Allies and partners while upholding the Army's commitment to environmental stewardship under an unprecedented operational tempo.

The members of ENV are:

- Mike Tillema, P.E., Environmental Chief, ODCSENG
- Fabian Kahiamoe, Environmental Program Manager, ODCSENG
- Environmental Program Manager (vacant, but held by Ms. Jaimie Atwell and Mr. John Urbanic during award period), ODCSENG



Figure 1. US Installations in the USAREUR-AF AOR

Background

The ENV program has grown substantially from just a decade ago as a single civilian responsible for environmental baseline surveys in Romania and Bulgaria. Today, the team of three supports tens of thousands of deployed troops under Operation Atlantic Resolve and has

developed to the point of writing environmental policy for all U.S. forces across two nations as the designated Lead Environmental Component (LEC).

As the only environmental office within the USAREUR-AF Staff, ENV works closely with partners across directorates and external agencies to accomplish its mission. Crucially, because environmental management at forward sites is performed by deployed units as a secondary or tertiary duty, ENV functions as the reachback Environmental Division – similar to one on-site that these units would normally find within their home-station Directorate of Public Works (DPW). In this capacity, the team provides standard operating procedures, spill response guidance, and direct coordination for hazardous waste disposal.

To effectively manage a vast and complex environmental program under such demanding conditions, the ENV team developed five distinct Lines of Effort (LOEs) to organize its broad spectrum of responsibilities, which range from on-site tactical support to representing the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) on bilateral committees.

Line of Effort	Description	Daily Responsibilities
Theater Leadership	Provide leadership, policy, funding, and subject matter expertise for environmental management across the AOR. This also includes performing the duties of LEC for assigned countries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manage environmental quality budget rivaling that of large CONUS installations - Proponent of 3 theater Army regulations - Lead/Participate in various working groups - Represent as LEC for two countries
Requirements Integration	Integrate environmental requirements and develop comprehensive impact assessments for all command plans, programs, and projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide technical review of projects - Complete environmental impact analyses for engineering projects and other movements - Participate in exercise planning, write orders, incorporate national requirements - Coordinate with logisticians, POL managers, force health protection, strategic planners, operational planners etc.
Compliance	Ensure all units adhere to DoD, Army, and USAREUR-AF environmental policies, as well as all applicable international agreements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct compliance inspections during operations and exercises - Provide guidance to Soldiers on the ground for spills, hazardous waste management, etc.
Documentation	Manage the execution and maintenance of all environmental documentation for forward operating sites, exercises, and operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop, fund, or ensure completion of environmental surveys and studies - Analyze results, make recommendations
Training and Awareness	Develop and deliver training, policy guidance, and outreach materials for environmental protection outside of U.S. Army Garrisons.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Host training sessions, continually review and update training content - Develop and distribute outreach material like apps, field cards, or maps soldiers can use in the field.

ENV performs regular internal audits and although there are program areas to improve, they are compliant with DoD Instructions 4715.05, 4715.22, and Army Regulation 200-1.

Outside of regular responsibilities, ENV regularly engages with its home station community. They have partnered with the USAG Wiesbaden DPW Environmental Division to celebrate Earth Day and organized field trips to the local wastewater treatment plant and nature sanctuaries. They have also volunteered at schools, providing presentations on careers in the environmental industry, water treatment experiments, and guidance during STEM competitions.

Summary of Accomplishments

In a period of unprecedented operational tempo, the USAREUR-AF Environmental Branch (ENV) demonstrated exceptional leadership, commitment to their craft, and innovation saving the US Army time and money. Their accomplishments directly enabled the USAREUR-AF mission by ensuring environmental compliance across a vast, multinational theater, protecting the mission from disruption and conserving limited resources, and building a sustainable culture of environmental stewardship.

Advancing International Agreements and Policy through Strategic Diplomacy

A cornerstone of the team's success lies in their responsibility as the Lead Environmental Component (LEC) for three nations. Fulfilling this role directly complies with DoD and US European Command (EUCOM) Instructions and supports Program Management and Stakeholder Interaction at the highest levels.

- **Bilateral Leadership:** The ENV team co-chairs Environmental Sub-committees, working directly with HN authorities to establish operating policies for *all* DoD entities, resolve complex environmental issues, represent environmental equities across other functional area sub-committees, and brief senior military and diplomatic leadership. This requires fostering new international relationships, understanding the geopolitical climate, adapting communication styles, and recognizing low- to high-level requirements.
- **Breaking a 6-Year Impasse:** The team achieved a major breakthrough by completing two Final Governing Standards (FGS) in 2024, comprehensive environmental compliance documents required under DoD Instruction, that had been delinquent and stalled for six years. This success removes a significant compliance risk and ensures a stable operating environment for U.S. forces and reaffirms the Army's commitment of environmental stewardship to allied nations.
- **Cost-Effective Management:** Demonstrating fiscal responsibility, the team executed this critical task by leveraging an existing contract vehicle, avoiding a new and costly contracting process and saving significant government funds and labor hours.
- **Agreement Development:** Because of unique experience in Poland as LEC and higher headquarters for preponderance of forces stationed in Poland, led cross-service development of a template for a US-Poland Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for Environmental Matters to replace the outdated Implementing Arrangement. That MoU was used as the basis for a EUCOM Implementing Arrangement template for all 10+ countries with which the United States has a new Defense Cooperation Agreement.

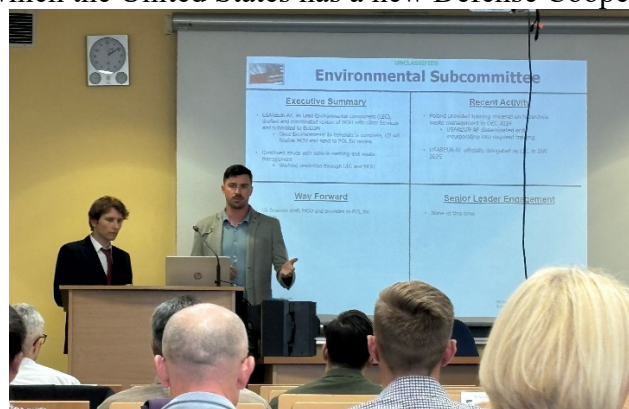


Figure 2. Mr. Tillema presents the Environmental Sub-Committee alongside the Polish Co-Chair in Krakow, Poland

Building a Robust, Mission-Focused Environmental Officer (EO) Program

Recognizing a critical gap in a theater dominated by rotational forces deployed for 3- to 9-month periods, ENV established a comprehensive and sustainable Environmental Officer (EO) Program, directly enhancing Mission Readiness and Program Management.

- **Training:** The team proactively identified that the legacy 40-hour, Germany-focused EO training was inapplicable and burdensome for the high tempo of rotational forces. Demonstrating exceptional Technical Merit and Orientation to Mission, they initiated a complete overhaul of the program. The result is a new, streamlined 24-hour curriculum that is specifically tailored to the realities of deployed and operational settings. This innovation ensures future EOs will receive relevant, effective instruction that respects their time and directly enhances compliance in the field.
- **Program Management:** To overcome the challenge of tracking EOs across hundreds of transient units, the team developed a robust management tool using Microsoft Teams, rewrote operational orders to institutionalize requirements, leveraged subordinate commands to enhance accountability, and established a well-attended monthly EO sync meeting to foster a community of practice.
- **On-site Coordination:** ENV conducts routine Site-Support Visits to each location to meet unit commanders and EOs, provide in-person and location-specific training, meet HN environmental representatives, and walk the site to identify areas with compliance issues and any areas where units are excelling in environmental management. Through these events, the team is able to identify equipment gaps, which ENV fills by quickly purchase appropriate materials to gain compliance.
- **EO Outreach:** the 24-hour and on-site training both highlight the importance of “training the trainer” – or enabling EOs to train appropriate members of their units. They are not only trained on compliance, but also on stewardship and sustainability – with topics ranging from recycling to water conservation to climate resilience.
- **Awards Program:** A key innovation was the establishment of the first USAREUR-AF Environmental Awards Program. This initiative creates a lasting impact by incentivizing excellence, sharing best practices, and reinforcing the principle that superior environmental management is a key component of mission readiness.



Figure 3. Mr. Kahiamoe meets an EO during a Site Support Visit in Powidz, Poland



Figure 4. the 201st Regional Support Group receives the USAREUR-AF Environmental Award in Poznan, Poland

Enabling Strategic Force Repositioning in Poland

The ENV team's expertise was critical in facilitating \$50B+ in NATO military aid packages to Ukraine through the supporting US forces operating the contingency logistics hub in Jasionka, Poland. Prior to the award period, they executed Environmental Baseline Surveys and established policy for rotational units on ground and throughout the award period, provided consistent support for hazardous material and waste management, spill response, and fuel efficiency measures for ground equipment. Beginning in Spring 2025, USAREUR-AF began to rapidly reposition equipment and forces out of Jasionka and transfer operations to NATO and Polish allies. Because of the repositioning of forces, ENV directly completed Environmental Site Closure Surveys to close out US-led areas and operations and enable termination of leases. Their work facilitated the proper disposal of hazardous waste, completion of all required closure surveys, and execution of necessary environmental sampling and spill cleanup, ensuring cost savings from claims against the US government and ultimately, mission success without compromising environmental standards.

Spearheading Environmental Stability for the New U.S. Army Garrison Poland

As U.S. Army Garrison (USAG) Poland was established in 2023, the ENV team provided indispensable support to this new organization, which supports approximately 1,000 permanent employees and 5,000 rotational units annually. The team's efforts ensured a seamless environmental transition and established long-term programs across 11 sites. Although authority has been transferred to garrison staff, ENV provides continued support because of staffing shortages and increased workloads on-site.

- **Massive Cost Savings through Bilateral Agreements:** By expertly leveraging bilateral support and logistics agreements, ENV's leadership secured a landmark hazardous waste management partnership with Polish allies. This initiative directly saves U.S. taxpayers over \$3M annually in disposal costs, plus hundreds of thousands more in facility management – a monumental achievement in Program Management.
- **Leading the Charge for Potable Water:** The team is championing a multi-year effort to enable USAG Poland to declare its water systems as potable, reducing reliance on single-

use plastic bottles. They funded sanitary surveys and vulnerability assessments and now provide consistent leadership to the bilateral Polish-U.S. Drinking Water Working Group (DWWG), guiding HN partners to meet U.S. standards. This demonstrates exceptional Stakeholder Interaction and a long-term vision for Impact/Outcomes.



Figure 5. Mr. Tillema reviews water system documentation in Zagan, Poland

- Directly Equipping the Force for Compliance: To mitigate risk and empower units, ENV procured and distributed critical environmental supplies across the theater, ensuring soldiers have the tools they need to maintain compliance.

Equipment Procured	Quantity*
Industrial Storage Containers	17
Steel Vehicle Containment Berms	2
Secondary Containment Pallets	210
Spill Kits	100

* most equipment procured for USAG Poland, but includes those for other sites around the theater

Future Plans

ENV has already begun developing an automated Environmental Management System (EMS) through Microsoft 365 Power Apps and Power BI to enable timely reporting, an accessible repository of resources, and real-time compliance statuses of units throughout the theater. This system will centralize many aspects of environmental management into one tool, streamlining work flow and unit oversight. In conjunction with this EMS, ENV has developed a mobile application (available beginning 2026!) that units can download and find environmental resources, maps, points of contact, and report spills. This app will complement and bolster the EMS by easing reporting and communications requirements for units in the field.