

SPECIAL SERIES



BREAKING GROUND

A Spotlight on Six Women in the U.S. Environmental Industry

AKISHA STAGGERS

LEARNING FAST, LEADING EARLY: AN ENVIRONMENTAL CAREER BUILT ONE LAYER AT A TIME

From floodplain management at 21 to senior management, Akisha Staggers built her career by listening closely and learning continuously.



As a curious child raised in New Orleans and northern Virginia, Akisha loved trampling through the woods, collecting rocks, and pondering the connection between nature, rocks, and energy. During a summer program at American University, she was exposed to the environmental field and met similar students. A visit to Congress to see policymaking in action showed her environmental careers extending beyond science and into policy and government decision-making, which inspired Akisha to attend and obtain a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Sciences at Virginia Tech. However, Akisha's learning path didn't stop there.

Smaller Offices, Big Opportunities

At 21, Akisha joined PBS&J (which her family jokingly referred to as "PB&J") to support their floodplain management team, which involved researching, analyzing,

and issuing Letters of Map Amendment on behalf of FEMA. The detailed work and real responsibility taught Akisha collaboration, clear communication, and ownership of deliverables. At PBS&J, Akisha learned Phase I and II due diligence and navigating a small work environment where no role was too small or too large. One of the head engineers, her supervisor, Dennis Papa, reinforced a mindset she abides by to this day: "We can do anything. We can figure it out."

**“We can do anything. WE CAN FIGURE
IT OUT.”**

When the Richmond office closed, Akisha faced her first experience with professional uncertainty and the need to adapt to decisions outside her control.

Building Regulatory Depth

Later at Dominion Due Diligence Group (D3G), Akisha deepened her experience in regulatory work. D3G is an expert in the niche area of HUD environmental assessment and Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae support, which requires an understanding of NEPA compliance and federal guidance. This regulatory background differentiated Akisha and connected her to projects tied to affordable housing and federally funded development. “Interpreting complex regulations and guidance to help a project forge ahead was exciting to me,” she said.

Access to Leadership

At Blackstone Consulting LLC, Akisha leveraged her due diligence and regulatory background in senior review and Practice Leader roles, focusing on workflow efficiency, staff training, and on-time delivery without sacrificing quality. Akisha selected Blackstone, because several women held meaningful leadership roles. “That was one of the reasons why I was excited to join that company,” she said. Seeing women like Becky Renick, Sarah Denton, and Natalie McDonald actively shaping decisions and financial strategy had an impact.

When Rimkus acquired Blackstone in 2021, Akisha stepped into the role of Vice President of Operations. She managed the legacy team during the end of the company’s acquisition transition and navigated shifting market conditions and an industry slowdown.

She described that period as one of the most challenging of her career. It required maintaining team cohesion and protecting delivery standards amid restructuring. All made possible by collaborating with leaders like Allan Coffee, Michelle Thomas, Fewzi Fardeheb, Amine Riouche, Dave Johnson, and James Previte.

When the company shifted from a centralized model to a regional structure, she transitioned into a new leadership role as Technical VP supporting QA/QC for the environmental and natural resource groups.

Akisha describes her career as a snowball, each move layering additional experience onto what she already knew. “My friends say I am like a Swiss Army Knife,” reflecting her range across technical, regulatory, and operational roles.

Independence and New Heights

In 2026, Akisha launched Second Street Consulting LLC to provide environmental review services, assessment services, training, and regulatory guidance, working with peers she has known for years.



Having her own business allows her to build on the foundation she developed in small firms. “With your own business, you must wear many hats, representing many departments,” she said. “Taking the time to investigate and research new technologies and methodologies that determine the best approach for the business at hand is now a priority. I have always loved learning and will continue to upgrade and enhance my current knowledge base.”

Part of that ongoing learning includes watching how artificial intelligence may shape environmental due diligence. Akisha believes AI will change how due diligence reports are generated and improve efficiency over time, while recognizing that strong analytical foundations remain essential.

Mentors, Advisors, and More

Mentorship was integral to shaping Akisha’s career, beginning with her family. Her great-grandparents and

grandparents have always been business owners and business-minded, owning businesses and commercial property as far back as the 1940s. Her father is an architect and her mother a nurse practitioner, both dedicated to their professions and committed to contributing to their communities. Their example of discipline and purpose shaped how Akisha approaches her work and the standards she sets for herself.



Throughout her career, she benefited from coworkers, supervisors, and professional women who helped guide her growth. She credits those mentors with sharpening her judgment, reinforcing the importance of continued learning, and strengthening her resilience.

Advice for Women Entering the Industry

Akisha offers this practical advice to women starting their environmental careers:

- Seek mentors and be willing to listen and learn.
- Look for positions that allow decision-making and autonomy.
- Build and maintain professional networks.
- Learn the fundamentals thoroughly and continue adding to your knowledge base.
- Let your passion guide your direction.

These principles continue to guide Akisha's work and will shape whatever comes next. 📖



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