NMJC: training workers to ‘fill the pipeline’

Life changed dramatically this month for Jay Funderburk and Kevin Bennett. Two of WIPP’s new waste-handlers-in-training are immersed in nuclear facility culture, where all work is “by the book.”

Funderburk left a City of Hobbs environmental job. Bennett was employed at a Hobbs radiator repair business. Actually, their transformation began months ago when they enrolled in radiological control and waste-handling courses at New Mexico Junior College (NMJC).

The DOE Carlsbad Field Office and WTS partnered with NMJC for an August 2002 startup of a flexible curriculum that begins with one preparatory short course. Students pursue 15 or 33-hour certificates or an associate degree in applied science. Funderburk and Bennett earned 15-hour certificates, preparing them for the initial DOE qualifying exam.

“NMJC has created an excellent resource to fill WIPP’s workforce pipeline with qualified candidates,” says David Chavez, Technical Training manager, who helped organize the program at its inception.

Bob Wade and other WTS Integrated Waste Operations managers helped program director Olav Amundsen—an engineer who makes regular WIPP site visits-develop curriculum. They recruit Amundsen’s students, too. “He prepared us well for understanding the program-the procedures, qualifications-and how everything is done by the book,” says Bennett. Their work demands math and science proficiency.

Students participating in the NMJC radiological and waste handling program convene for class with Olav Amundsen, program director.

Number of students completing NMJC certificates to date 6
Number hired at WIPP 4
Number from Lea County 3

Twenty-seven enrolled in the first class a year ago. Classes now average 10 students. Radiological workers are needed at nuclear waste management facilities across New Mexico and the United States. Throughout the life of the repository, WIPP will need these skilled workers. Until another ramp-up, waste operations are at capacity with 28 radiological control technicians and 34 waste handlers.

Next semester, three core courses will be online to accommodate working students. “The outlook with new facilities like the uranium enrichment plant [Lea County] and, possibly, the modern pit facility is great,” Amundsen says. “We will continue to be an integral part in training workers for WIPP and new facilities in the area.”

NMJC’s efforts enhance the regional applicant pool, speed up worker qualification and improve outlook for worker retention. “It’s definitely given us a better-quality candidate,” Wade says. NMJC teaches the CL-100 series of DOE requirements. Worker qualification continues with WIPP-specific CL-200 on-the-job training.

Funderburk and Bennett readily agree their education and effort are paying off.

Contact Olav Amundsen: 505-392-5335 (Ext. 265) or 800-657-6260 or oamundsen@nmjc.cc.nm.us.
Shipments expected this week: Hanford (2), LANL (3), RFETS (10), SRS (6)

TRU TeamWorks

A weekly e-newsletter for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant team

September 18, 2003

The Big Story

Characterization Operations completed at ANL-E

Months of dedication and teamwork have paid off for WIPP Central Characterization Project (CCP) employees working at Argonne National Laboratory - East (ANL-E). Characterization activities at the site have successfully completed, overcoming numerous technical challenges.

Characterization methods at the site were reorganized in early 2003 after a determination was made to open each drum to remove any items prohibited for disposal at WIPP. Since then, the team has characterized and shipped more than 400 drums of debris waste to WIPP. The last two shipments of waste are scheduled to occur by the end of this month.

In addition to characterizing the original population of debris drums, and “daughter” waste drums that resulted from drum opening and remediation, ANL-E site management asked CCP personnel to characterize an additional 29 debris waste drums. CBFO approved the added work scope, and the CCP team completed the work in early August. Much of the mobile characterization equipment docked at the site will now be, or has already been, moved to other facilities around the nation.

The WIPP team has also characterized a group of homogeneous solid waste drums for disposal at WIPP. The homogeneous solid waste will be shipped to WIPP this fall. An audit of the processes required to approve the homogeneous wastes for shipment to WIPP was completed in late August in Carlsbad. Homogeneous waste requires additional characterization steps beyond those required for debris wastes. Last month's audit demonstrated that these additional requirements were met for the ANL-E homogeneous wastes.

“The National TRU Program is pleased to complete its work at ANL-E and is already preparing for the next characterization mission,” says Farok Sharif, NTP manager. “Our CCP team, including the project office in Carlsbad, did an outstanding job on this project.”

Bob Billet, ANL-E project manager, agrees. “The ANL-E team has demonstrated exceptional teamwork, safety and dedication during the last several months. Our WIPP employees and subcontractors, Bartlett Nuclear Services, Eberline and Bio Imaging Research and the ANL-E organizations have stepped up in every way to make this project a success. I'm proud of the work we have done here and the manner in which we worked together to complete our mission.”

Above: Members of the ANL-E team line up on the occasion of their first debris shipment to WIPP. From left: Bob Billett, Tommy Mojica, Rick Castillo, Larry Bolden (Bartlett Nuclear Services), Abe Romo, L. J. Walker, Ron Mojica (no longer with WTS) and Wes Root. Not shown are Beverly Medlin, Harvey Padilla and Michael Williams.

In the news

Oversize waste boxes
Training for public safety
Salt hoist keeps going and going
Is that an umbrella?
NMJC changes lives
WIPP Team Members News

WIPP Shipments
(as of 9-18-03 at 7:17 a.m.)

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<td>2,020</td>
<td>Total shipments received at WIPP</td>
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In the news