Worker Training Program: Alaska
A National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) Superfund-Related Activity

The NIEHS Worker Training Program (WTP) annually funds about 80 health and safety courses for 1,700 workers in Alaska. These grantee-led trainings are preparing workers to handle hazardous materials and respond to disasters in their communities.

Courses include:
• Basic Superfund Site Worker and Site Worker Refresher
• Confined Space Rescue
• Disaster Site Worker Train-the-Trainer
• Emergency Response
• General Industry and General Construction Safety
• Hazard Communication
• Hazardous Waste Operations
• Lead Abatement Supervisor

Training Highlights

Community College Training
Courses on oil spill and emergency response are offered through Prince William Sound Community College in Valdez by the Community College Consortium for Health and Safety Training/National Partnership for Environmental Technology Education.

The grantee also has provided Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) training on fishing vessels for fleets in six Alaska ports. Many of the contracted trainers are safety professionals with the Alyeska Pipeline. In general, community colleges train the majority of technician-level emergency responders and industrial workers in the nation.

Training for Native Americans and Rural Villages
The University of Washington (UW), a member of the Western Region Universities Consortium, provides courses in Alaska. UW works with three different local organizations to provide training:

Zender Environmental
Through its Rural Program, Zender Environmental provides environmental training and employment for unemployed residents in remote non-hub Native Villages impacted by environmental health issues.
Since 2014, UW has provided key courses for the training program, such as 40-hour HAZWOPER, general construction safety, confined space, and first aid/CPR.

In 2016, 88 percent of RACEJT graduates found work in their villages as a direct result of this training. The program reaches residents from Goodnews Bay, Togiak, Manokotak, Chaulthbaluk, Grayling, Akhiok, and other areas.

**Kawerak, Inc.**

UW provides onsite environmental and construction training for Kawerak, Inc., a nonprofit that provides services throughout the Bering Straits Region. Safety and health training wouldn’t otherwise be available to these individuals because of the remoteness of Bering Strait Region native villages. The program predominantly reaches the Inupiaq, St. Lawrence Island Yupik, and Central Yup’ik communities.

**Bristol Bay Native Corporation**

UW provides safety and health training for village residents competing for jobs that historically have been filled by workers flying in from other regions. The students are mainly Yup’ik (Bristol Bay side), Dena’ina Athabascan Indians, and Aleut/Alutiiq.

**Overall Training**

In recent years, the following NIEHS WTP grantees have provided training in Alaska:

- Alabama Fire College Workplace Safety Training
- Community College Consortium for Health and Safety Training/National Partnership for Environmental Technology Education (PETE)
- International Chemical Workers Union Council Center for Worker Health and Safety Education (through consortia member American Federation of Teachers)
- International Union of Operating Engineers National Training Fund
- Western Region Universities Consortium (through consortia member University of Washington)

Candice Saunders, came to the RACEJT program as an unemployed single mother. She wanted to better her employment prospects within her own rural Alaska community of Allakaket, population 107. After the training, Candice got a job as a seasonal fire fighter inside and outside her community.

In 2016, Candice took a position with the community’s Indian General Assistance Program (IGAP), which was beginning to have positive impacts on the community’s environmental health. Because of her intensive RACEJT training in solid waste management, job skills, and MS Word and Excel, Candice continued the IGAP workplan with little ramp up time.

Without Candice, Allakaket would have suffered the common fate of Alaska’s small villages when a skilled professional leaves – an organizational gap, in this case intended to protect community environmental health, that is hard to fill.

As the IGAP coordinator, Candice has created successful recycling programs, sustainable landfill operations, and better wastewater practices.

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