



Worker Training Program: Alaska

A National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) Superfund-Related Activity

The NIEHS Worker Training Program (WTP) annually funds about 60 health and safety courses for 1,700 workers in Alaska. Recipients of NIEHS grants lead training to prepare 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
- Emergency Response Incident Command
- General Construction and General Industry Safety
- Hazard Communication
- Hazardous Waste Operations
- Lead Awareness
- Mass Casualty Incident Triage
- Radiation and Nuclear Awareness

Training Highlights

Job Training for Native Americans and Rural Villages

High transportation and infrastructure costs in Alaska make certain safety practices, such as hauling dangerous waste out of the region, cost-prohibitive and hazardous. To address worker health and safety challenges, the Western Region Universities Consortium provides courses to tribes in Alaska through consortia member University of Washington (UW). These courses teach how to protect workers, improve emergency and disaster response, increase employment opportunities, and build capacity in Native American communities. UW works with the following organizations to provide training.

Zender Environmental Health and Research Group

Zender manages the Rural Alaska Community Education Job Training (RACEJT) Program, which provides environmental training for unemployed and underemployed residents in remote Alaska Native Villages impacted by environmental health issues.

UW regularly delivers key training courses for RACEJT, such as hazardous waste worker, construction safety, confined space, first aid, and CPR courses. In addition, the program recently added courses on community oil spill response, rural solid and hazardous waste management, and rural Alaska landfill operator courses.

In 2019, 92% of RACEJT graduates found work as technicians in fields such as environmental consulting, waste management, and spill response as a direct result of this training. The program reaches residents across the state in Kongiganak, Pauloff Harbor, Alakanuk, Tuntutuliak, New Stuyahok, Scammon Bay, and other areas.



Photo courtesy of Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation



Photo courtesy of Zender Environmental

About the Worker Training Program

WTP funds nonprofit organizations to provide health and safety training for workers who may be exposed to hazardous materials and waste at work or while assisting with emergency response. WTP was initiated under the Hazardous Substance Basic Research and Training Program authorized by the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986 (42 USC 9660a).

Under these NIEHS Superfund-related activities, WTP grantees provide trainings across the country through the [Hazardous Waste, Hazmat Disaster, and Environmental Career Worker Training Programs](#).

For more information, visit www.niehs.nih.gov/wtp.

Bristol Bay Native Corporation

Bristol Bay Native Corporation, a tribal corporation, provides health and safety training for village residents that historically have been filled by workers from other regions. The students are mainly Yup'ik (Bristol Bay side), Dena'ina Athabascan Indians, and Aleut/Alutiiq. Training included a basic superfund site worker course in Dillingham, located in southwest Alaska at the head of Nushagak Bay. These workers otherwise might not have access to formal job training because Dillingham is only accessible by sea or air.

Tribal Solid Waste Advisory Network

UW annually trains members of the Tribal Solid Waste Advisory Network, a nonprofit organization of 34 federally recognized Tribes and other tribal consortia throughout Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. The organization promotes effective and environmentally responsible solid waste management for their reservations and communities. Recent training included 8-hour hazardous waste worker refresher and 16-hour hazardous waste characterization courses.

Community College Training

Every year, more than 1,600 students receive oil spill and emergency response and hazardous waste operations training through Prince William Sound College (PWSC) in Valdez. Since 1998, PWSC has assisted Alyeska Pipeline Service Company in conducting annual oil spill response training. The training is sponsored by the Community College Consortium for Health and Safety Training/National Partnership for Environmental Technology Education.



Photo courtesy of Prince William Sound College

The college delivers a fishing vessel training program that helps students, many of whom are Alaska Natives, gain oil sector employment in the area. The vessel crews are considered “first responders” to an oil spill and are trained each year to refresh their skills in deploying, operating, and maintaining equipment. Indoor and outdoor classes provide on-water drills so crew members are prepared to respond to a major oil spill at any time. The training is offered in six ports — Kodiak, Homer, Seward, Whittier, Valdez, and Cordova — on more than 420 fishing vessels.

Hazardous Materials Technical Skills for Firefighters

The International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) conducts emergency response and hazardous materials training in communities across the country, including those that are rural, remote, or do not have the resources found in larger urban centers. This training often fills gaps in requirements for municipalities and first responder agencies.



Photo courtesy of IAFF

IAFF provided a 40-hour confined space rescue and its flagship 80-hour hazmat technician courses in Anchorage. One trainee in the confined space rescue course stated that it was “some of the best instruction I have experienced in my 20 years of fire service training. Firefighters teaching firefighters really works.”

Personal Story from the RACEJT Program in Alaska



Photo courtesy of Integrity Environmental

Jerry Kusayak came to the RACEJT program unemployed and seeking a new path in life. A strong and consistent student in the program, he was selected as a potential job candidate by a program partner in Cold Bay.

Through hard work and interviewing preparation help from the RACEJT program, Jerry landed the job. The skills and credentials provided by the confined space entry and hazardous waste worker training were integral to his success.

Jerry secured employment as a confined space technician with Integrity Environmental, an environmental consulting firm, before the program's end.

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