

Worker Training Program

An NIEHS Superfund-Related Activity

The Worker Training Program (WTP) provides health and safety training for thousands of workers who may be involved in handling hazardous materials or in responding to emergency releases of hazardous materials. These workers gain new skills on how to safely handle, remove, and contain hazardous waste, such as chemicals, asbestos, radiation, and lead.

Recognizing the threat posed by dangerous chemicals and other pollutants left in toxic waste dumps nationwide, Congress created the landmark Superfund program in 1980 to clean up various sites. The WTP was created through the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986, under the Hazardous Substance Basic Research and Training Program (42 USC 9660a).

WTP is part of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), one of the National Institutes of Health. Since 1987, WTP has funded a network of nonprofit organizations that conduct training in every U.S. state and territory. The program is committed to creating a national workforce that can protect themselves, co-workers, and communities from environmental hazards. Training is a key part of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's federal regulations protecting workers engaged in hazardous waste operations.¹

Between 1995 and 2017, more than 11,000 workers were trained in the Environmental Career Worker Training Program, with an average job placement rate of 70 percent. Completing the training increased an individual's chance of employment by about 59 percent.



Photo courtesy of International Association of Fire Fighters

Training Programs

WTP provides grants to labor-based health and safety organizations, academic institutions, and other nonprofit organizations, so they can deliver training to a variety of workers who may face a hazardous work environment, such as:

- Environmental cleanup workers
- Law enforcement officers
- First responders
- Health care employees
- Industrial or construction workers
- Transportation or rail workers

Some training is tailored to specific populations, such as underemployed or non-English-speaking workers.

Currently, WTP has six major training programs.²

The **Hazardous Waste Worker Training Program**, initiated in 1987, provides occupational safety and health training for workers who may be engaged in activities related to hazardous waste removal, containment, or chemical emergency response. This program is the core component of WTP. More than 3 million workers have been trained since its inception.



Photo courtesy of CPWR – The Center for Construction Research and Training

The **Environmental Career Worker Training Program**, formerly the Minority Worker Training Program, began in 1995. It has provided job training to more than 11,000 workers in underserved communities, teaching the skills necessary to obtain employment in environmental cleanup and construction fields.

The **HAZMAT Disaster Preparedness Training Program** supports the development and delivery of training to prepare workers for hazardous material and debris cleanup commonly needed after natural and man-made disasters. The program, started in 2005, has trained about 130,000 workers.

The **Small Business Innovation Research E-Learning for HAZMAT Program**, started in 2001, provides grants to organizations to develop e-learning products, such as virtual reality and handheld device applications. These products support the health and safety training of hazardous material workers, emergency responders, and skilled support personnel.

The **NIEHS/Department of Energy (DOE) Nuclear Worker Training Program**, initiated in 1993, provides safety and health training for hazardous material handlers and waste workers at DOE facilities. Many of these workers are engaged in the cleanup of closed nuclear weapons facilities, which are some of the most dangerous radioactive sites

in the world. Workers deal with radioactive wastes, spent nuclear fuel, excess plutonium and uranium, and contaminated soil and groundwater. More than 590,000 workers have been trained under this program, which is funded by DOE.

The **Ebola Biosafety and Infectious Disease Response Training Program** develops and delivers infection control practices and hazard recognition training for workers in health care and non-health care settings who may be at risk of exposure to infectious diseases, such as Ebola, Zika, and highly contagious flu. The program, started in 2016, has trained more than 22,000 workers, including nurses, first responders, environmental service workers, and others. The three-year program was funded by Congress with emergency Ebola treatment and prevention funds.

For more information on available training, go to www.niehs.nih.gov/wtp.

Courses

The WTP network of grantees offers more than 90 courses to thousands of workers each year. Many of these are tied to Superfund site cleanup and regulatory requirements. Other courses, such as General Construction Safety and Hazard Communication, teach workers and employers how to recognize, avoid, and prevent health and safety hazards in the workplace. WTP also supports development of new curricula for emerging threats, such as opioid safety for first responders, working with nanomaterials, and dealing with infectious diseases.



Photo courtesy of Deep South Biosafety Worker Training Program



Photo courtesy of Western Region Universities Consortium

Economic Impact

Through the Environmental Career Worker Training Program, NIEHS partners with state and local organizations across the U.S. to provide health, safety, and life skills training, as well as career guidance. Between 1995 and 2017, more than 11,000 workers were trained, with an average job placement rate of 70 percent. A study of the program's impact³ estimated that completing the training increases an individual's probability of employment by about 59 percent.

The study also found that the program has a positive nationwide economic impact. The benefits include increased earnings; reduction in workplace injuries, hiring costs, crime-related costs, and federal benefits like food and housing subsidies; and additional tax revenue due to increased employment rates and higher earnings. The program serves as a model for other federally funded worker training programs, helps to advance environmental justice, and supports ex-offender rehabilitation.

Responding to Disasters

When disasters strike, WTP coordinates its network of grantees to provide training for response, recovery, and cleanup. Organizations in the WTP network are often called upon to provide awareness training for workers, communities, and volunteers. They may also conduct train-the-trainer courses to teach people how to train others. The network is integrated into other federal emergency response efforts as part of the U.S. National Response Framework.

WTP has been part of the response to, and recovery from, many major U.S. disasters, including:

- World Trade Center attack
- Deepwater Horizon oil spill
- Hurricanes Katrina, Sandy, Harvey, Irma, and Maria
- Ebola outbreak
- Water crisis in Flint, Michigan

National Clearinghouse

The National Clearinghouse for Worker Safety and Health Training⁴ is a resource for hazardous waste worker curricula, technical reports, and weekly news on hazardous materials, waste operations, and emergency response. Funded by WTP, the clearinghouse provides technical assistance to WTP staff, grantees, and the general public. Training curricula developed by grantees is available through an online curricula catalog.

Many clearinghouse tools are available in more than one language, and all are available to download from the clearinghouse website.



To support disaster response, the clearinghouse has training tools that address a variety of disasters, such as:

- Chemical incidents
- Earthquakes
- Hurricanes and floods
- Infectious diseases
- Mold cleanup and treatment
- Oil spills
- Terrorist attacks
- Responder and community resilience
- Wildfires

Pocket booklets are available and can be used as a guide for workers at a disaster site. For example, the clearinghouse distributed more than 62,000 booklets between August 2017 and August 2018, in response to the 2017 hurricanes in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

In addition, WTP is a partner in the NIH Disaster Research Response Program (DR2), a national framework for research on the public health aspects of disasters and emergencies. The DR2 website,⁵ developed by NIEHS and the National Library of Medicine, offers data collection tools and other resources to support researchers. WTP developed a Researcher Deployment Guide⁶ and helped plan multiple disaster research exercises for DR2.



Photo courtesy of U.S. Department of Energy Pantex Plant

For more information on the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, go to www.niehs.nih.gov.

For more information on the NIEHS Worker Training Program, visit www.niehs.nih.gov/wtp.

For more information on the National Clearinghouse for Worker Safety and Health Training, or to subscribe to the weekly e-newsletter, go to <https://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp>.

¹ OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration). 2018. Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER). Available: www.osha.gov/SLTC/emergencypreparedness/hazwoper [accessed September 17, 2018].

² NIEHS (National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences). 2018. Worker Training Program: Program Areas. Available: www.niehs.nih.gov/careers/hazmat/about_wetp/index.cfm [accessed September 17, 2018].

³ NIEHS (National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences). 2018. The Economic Impact of the Environmental Career Worker Training Program. Available: www.niehs.nih.gov/careers/hazmat/wtp_ecwtp_report_508.pdf [accessed September 17, 2018].

⁴ NIEHS (National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences). 2018. National Clearinghouse for Worker Safety and Health Training. Available: <https://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp> [accessed September 17, 2018].

⁵ NLM (National Library of Medicine). 2018. NIH Disaster Research Response. Available: <https://dr2.nlm.nih.gov> [accessed September 17, 2018].

⁶ NIEHS (National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences) Worker Training Program. 2018. Emergency Support Activation Plan Researcher Deployment Guide. Available: https://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp/public/hasl_get_blob.cfm?ID=11006 [accessed September 17, 2018].