

Environmental safety and health training: Models to address occupational health disparities and environmental justice

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Introduction

The idea of reclaiming contaminated properties such as brownfields for redevelopment is not a new one; however, linking this to occupational health disparities and community access to jobs is. Communities across the country have struggled to redevelop neighborhoods to make them healthy, safe, livable, and most importantly sustainable. The NIEHS Minority Worker Training Program addresses one of the most important and significant problems with urban unemployment—community workers lacking crucial technical and marketable job skills and experience on the job. The program also recognizes that the composition and culture of each community is different and that programs must include the community and local organizations at the core of the strategies to create sustainable communities. Holistic programs that develop career paths to impact those most vulnerable to occupational exposures such as minority workers, those untrained, undocumented and lacking access to healthcare are the key to address the issue of occupational health disparities and environmental justice.

About NIEHS WTP

The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) Worker Training Program (WTP) supports the training and education of workers engaged in activities related to hazardous materials and waste generation, removal, containment, transportation and emergency response. WTP is a federally funded program administered by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), an institute of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

Over the past twenty-five years the NIEHS WTP, in conjunction with 20 awardees, has supported the development of curricula and initiation of training programs throughout the country to help employers meet Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requirements under CFR 1910.120, Hazardous Waste Operations & Emergency Response. This model program encourages innovation for training difficult-to-reach populations by addressing issues such as literacy, appropriate adult education techniques, training quality improvement, and other areas un-addressed directly by the private sector.

The NIEHS WTP supports the development of model worker safety and health training development and delivery in four areas:

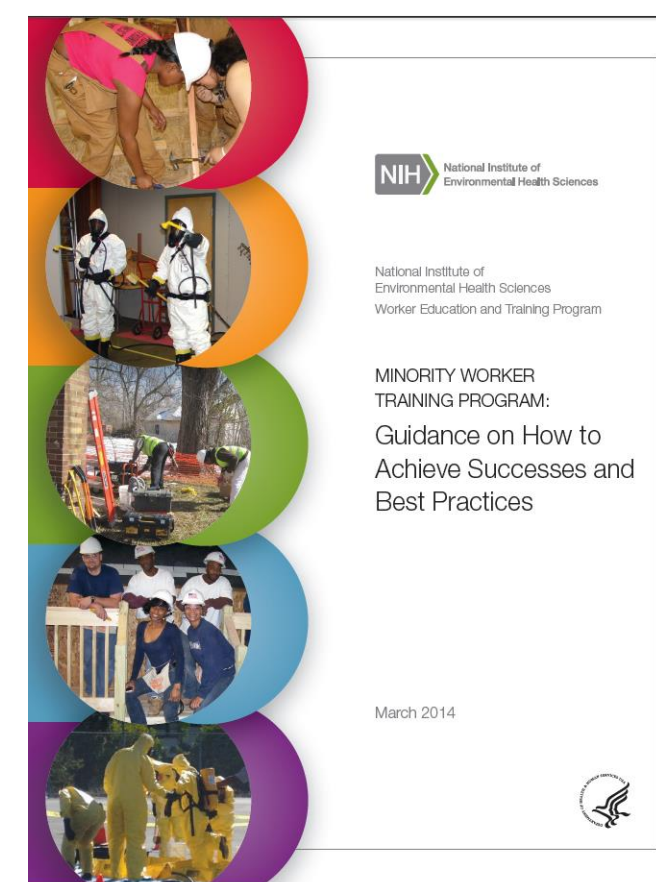
- Hazardous Waste Worker Training Program
- Minority Worker Training Program (MWTP)
- DOE Nuclear Weapons Cleanup Training
- Hazmat Disaster Preparedness Training Program

Minority Worker Training Programs Goals and Objectives

- The Minority Worker Training Program (MWTP) was established in 1995 to provide a series of national pilot programs to test a range of strategies for the recruitment and training of young persons. The Brownfields Minority Worker Training Program ended in 2008 and a specific Brownfields job training component has been incorporated into this program.
- These environmental career-oriented projects are developed within the context of other social and health needs of the community. The main goal of this program is to increase the number of individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds for jobs in the construction and environmental remediation industries. These programs promote long-lasting and effective partnerships in minority communities that help reinforce occupational health and worker education. This program strongly supports WTP approaches such as life skills that are culturally sensitive and address the needs of the minority workforce. The MWTP promotes partnerships or sub-agreements with academic and other institutions, with a particular focus on historically black colleges and universities, and public schools and community-based organizations located in or near the impacted area to provide pre-math, science or other related education to program participants prior to, or concurrent with, entry into the training program. The program increases sustainable employment opportunities, promotes economic development, addresses health disparities, and advances environmental justice.
- The program includes life skills training tailored to individual needs, covering a range of subjects such as remedial mathematics, tutoring, budget counseling and job readiness skills. These modules help prepare students to take apprenticeship and employment exams, as well as to pass environmental examinations leading to certifications in lead abatement, asbestos abatement and hazardous waste operations and emergency response.
- Some training also includes enrollment in apprenticeship programs for construction and environmental remediation worker training. Particular focus is placed on establishing a program of mentoring.

NIEHS WTP/MWTP Accomplishments

- Approximately 10,000 workers have trained under the MWTP with 70% of those workers obtaining employment in environmental remediation and construction fields. These and more accomplishments can be found in the March 2013 “Minority Worker Training Program: Guidance on How to Achieve Successes and Best Practices.” This guidance includes information on innovative techniques to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of these programs. It also provides model strategies to address barriers to successful program implementation (e.g., trainees who lack access to transportation or trainees who have low educational attainment.) http://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp/public/hasl_get_blob.cfm?ID=10040
- These programs are the embodiment of environmental justice by providing for the fair treatment of low income and minority residents of environmental justice communities by providing the knowledge and training necessary for workers to meaningfully participate in addressing the environmental concerns in their community.
- Worker training programs have completely changed the lives of the participants of the program by providing residents of low-income and minority communities the knowledge and skills to prepare them for long-term career opportunities in environmental assessment and cleanup, emergency response, construction and other careers.



Why target training for minority, unskilled, and untrained workers?

- Minority workers have increased rates of injuries, illnesses and mortality
- Often working in the dirtiest jobs
- Young unskilled workers have higher non-fatal injury rates
- Lack of access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and other safety equipment
- Lack of access to formal training programs and career opportunities in field
- Language, cultural and literacy barriers
- Lack of access to healthcare

Sources: BLS, 2003, 2005; Murray, 2003; CPWR Construction Chart book 2007 Eliminating Health Disparities Report 2011, Healthy People 2020

NIEHS WTP Awardees

Awardees of the MWTP provide training in the assessment and clean up contaminated sites to prepare the trainees to remediate hazardous waste, lead or asbestos contamination and/or to perform sampling and assessment at these sites. Integral to the success of this program is the safety first holistic approach to training by providing not only technical training, but construction, life skills (meaning critical thinking training, and remedial education) in science and math. Also community partners are able to successfully build their capacity to respond to local health and economic concerns through this program with current training taking place in 15 communities. The following are MWTP awardees under the current award period (2010-2015):

- CPWR—The Center for Construction Research and Training
- Dillard University Deep South Center for Environmental Justice
- New Jersey/New York Hazardous Materials Worker Training Center (NJ/NY Consortium)
- OAI, Inc.
- Western Region Universities Consortium

For more information

For more information about the Worker Training Program, especially the MWTP, please visit <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/careers/hazmat/programs/mwtp/index.cfm>

For more information about the National Clearinghouse for Worker Safety and Health Training please visit <http://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp/>

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