



## 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.<sup>1</sup>

*Between 1995 and 2023, more than 14,500 workers were trained in the Environmental Career Worker Training Program (ECWTP), with an average job placement rate of 70%.*



Photo courtesy of Atlantic Center for Occupational Health and Safety

### Training Programs

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

- Environmental cleanup workers
- First responders
- Health care employees
- Industrial or construction workers
- Law enforcement officers
- 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.<sup>2</sup>

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. Nearly 3.8 million workers have been trained since its inception.



Photo courtesy of Midwest Consortium for Hazardous Waste Worker Training

The **Environmental Career Worker Training Program**, formerly the Minority Worker Training Program, began in 1995. It has provided job training to more than 14,500 workers in communities that are underserved and that have environmental justice concerns. The program teaches 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 human-made disasters. The program, started in 2005, has trained more than 275,000 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 hand-held 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 755,000 workers have been trained under this program, which is funded by DOE.

**Infectious Disease and Biological Hazards Training** develops and delivers programs on the prevention of occupational exposure to infectious diseases, such as COVID-19, Ebola, Zika, and highly contagious flu. A variety of occupations are served. These training courses have been funded under various emergency appropriations and delivered to tens of thousands of workers, including nurses, first responders, environmental service workers, and others.

For more information on available training, go to <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/careers/hazmat>.

### Courses

The WTP network of grant recipients offers more than 90 courses 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 the 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 International Association of Fire Fighters



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 2023, more than 14,500 workers were trained with an average job placement of 70%. This is reflective of the total number of workers who participated in the ECWTP, regardless of whether they graduated from the program.

A 2024 study<sup>3</sup> of the ECWTP's impact shows the benefit is even greater for those who complete and graduate from the program. Based on a sample of more than 3,600 workers, the study results show that 80% of graduates were placed into jobs from 2014 to 2022.

The study also found that the program has a positive nationwide economic impact. The program returns approximately 28 times the amount invested by the federal government back into the economy. Other direct benefits to the economy include increased earnings, reduction in workplace injuries, and hiring cost and crime-related cost savings. The program serves as a model for other federally funded worker training programs, helps to advance environmental justice, and supports the rehabilitation of formerly incarcerated persons.

## Responding to Disasters

When disasters strike, WTP coordinates its network of grant recipients 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 part of the U.S. National Response Framework.

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

- COVID-19 pandemic
- Deepwater Horizon oil spill
- Ebola outbreak
- Hurricanes Katrina, Sandy, Harvey, Irma, and Maria
- Water crisis in Flint, Michigan
- World Trade Center attack

## National Clearinghouse

The National Clearinghouse for Worker Safety and Health Training<sup>4</sup> 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, grant recipients, and the general public. Training curricula developed by grant recipients is available through an online curricula catalog.



Photo courtesy of World Cares Center

Many clearinghouse tools are available in different languages, 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 also available from the clearinghouse and can be used by workers at a disaster site. For example, since 2017, the clearinghouse distributed tens of thousands of booklets in response to hurricanes in Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina, Puerto Rico, and Texas.

WTP is a partner in the NIH Disaster Research Response Program (DR2). This program<sup>5</sup> provides training, funding, and a Resources Portal of tools to empower human health research in response to disasters and public health emergencies. WTP developed a Researcher Deployment Guide<sup>6</sup> and helped plan multiple disaster research exercises for DR2.



Photo courtesy of Deep South Center for Environmental Justice

For more information on the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, go to <https://www.niehs.nih.gov>.

For more information on the NIEHS Worker Training Program, visit <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/careers/hazmat>.

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>.

<sup>1</sup> OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration). 2024. Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER). Available: <https://www.osha.gov/emergency-preparedness/hazardous-waste-operations> [accessed June 6, 2024].

<sup>2</sup> NIEHS (National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences). 2024. Worker Training Program: Program Areas. Available: [https://www.niehs.nih.gov/careers/hazmat/training\\_program\\_areas](https://www.niehs.nih.gov/careers/hazmat/training_program_areas) [accessed June 6, 2024].

<sup>3</sup> NIEHS (National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences). 2024. Environmental Career Worker Training Program. Available: [https://www.niehs.nih.gov/careers/hazmat/training\\_program\\_areas/ecwtp](https://www.niehs.nih.gov/careers/hazmat/training_program_areas/ecwtp) [accessed June 11, 2024].

<sup>4</sup> NIEHS (National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences). 2024. National Clearinghouse for Worker Safety and Health Training. Available: <https://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp> [accessed June 6, 2024].

<sup>5</sup> NIH, NIEHS (National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences). 2024. Disaster Research Response Program. Available: <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/programs/disaster> [accessed June 6, 2024]

<sup>6</sup> 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\\_blob.cfm?ID=11006](https://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp/public/hasl_blob.cfm?ID=11006) [accessed June 6, 2024].