

## **A Bit of History....of the Midwest Consortium**

### The Rationale, Initial Proposal (1986), and Year 1 (1987)

The following is taken from the 1986 initial application:

*The concept of a Midwest Consortium for Hazardous Waste Worker Training evolved from the recognition of regional strengths in worker education, technical knowledge and need. The member organizations of the Consortium are located in six states: Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Wisconsin. Some of the foremost worker training groups in the nation are found in this region and are members of the proposed Consortium. The University of Wisconsin School for Workers and the Illinois Labor Training Institute grew under the auspices of the New Directions program, initiated by Dr. Eula Bingham when she directed the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Both groups have continued to be unique resources in their respective states. The University of Michigan has undertaken innovative approaches to Hazard Communication Training among members of the United Auto Workers. The Southeast Michigan Coalition on Occupational Safety and Health (SEMCOSH) is one of the most active COSH groups in the country, providing valuable training for union and community groups. Michigan State University has received State support for its Hazardous Materials/Waste Training program for 5 years; the continued funding underscores the States recognition of this important program. Both of these Michigan Universities collaborated to form the Michigan Universities Hazardous Waste Management Consortium. Murray State University in Kentucky has a nationally recognized hazardous materials training program, and has recently applied for accreditation through the American Society of Safety Engineers. Purdue University has a vigorous program of training for persons working with hazardous materials. The University of Cincinnati has long been recognized as a center for industrial and environmental hygiene education. The Greater Cincinnati Occupational Health Center, a union-based medical clinic and industrial hygiene teaching resource provides medical and educational services to workers.*

*These organizations, rich in a tradition of training, will collaborate in the proposed Consortium to provide quality health and safety training to workers potentially exposed to hazardous waste in the six-state region. These training institutions are joined by the University of Kentucky, with its expertise in evaluation of training materials for workers. These groups possess a unique blend of technical expertise and an ability to provide training at the practitioner level.*

Letters of support were written by Governor Richard Celeste (Ohio), Tommy Thompson (Wisconsin), and J.D. Snyder for Governor Blanchard (Michigan). Among more than 40 other groups supporting the project were the Ohio Council of State Governments, Cincinnati AFL-CIO Labor Council, National Safety Council, Kentucky Safety and Health Network, Michigan Department of Labor, Indiana Department of Fire Prevention, Indiana Department of Building Safety, Environmental Management and Labor, and Wisconsin OSHA/Environmental Network.

The application, led by University of Cincinnati Professor Carol Rice, provided a plan of curriculum development, evaluation, and program presentation which resulted in the best score among all the proposals reviewed for the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS).

During the first year of the award, curricula were developed for site workers, municipal fire fighters, and employees at TSDFs. Sixty-six trainees completed programs. The Consortium led the group of other grantees in integrating qualitative and quantitative elements in evaluation and defining 24 hours as the required duration for operations-level emergency response training.

## The Consortium Grows and Innovates

In 1989, the School for Workers established a collaboration with the hazardous materials group at Lakeshore Technical College. The following year, Lakeshore assumed the major responsibility for training in Wisconsin.

In the second year, the Annual Trainer Meeting was initiated to bring trainers from throughout the Consortium together. Additional curricula were developed, and a revision process was established. NIEHS awarded the Consortium additional funding for expanded evaluation activities to more fully describe the impact of training.

Since the original group, substantial changes have occurred in Consortium membership. All evaluation activities were consolidated at the University of Kentucky and then later moved to the University of Cincinnati. Collaborations were established with the UBC Health and Safety Fund and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. Training centers were established in Minnesota and Tennessee. The Tennessee center, originally at Roane State Community College, was relocated to the University of Tennessee due to administrative changes. The center at Michigan State became the independent training organization Emergency Response Solutions International. The Kentucky training center found new homes at the University of Louisville, then at the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, and now at YouthBuild Louisville. The Indiana center moved from Purdue to the Environmental Management Institute, which later merged into Ivy Tech Community College system. The UBC and AFSCME subsequently received independent funding for their training activities. The Consortium added five community programs: Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice (now Green Door Initiative), Ohio Environmental Council, Citizens Environment Alliance, The Three Affiliated Tribes, and Fisk University. The Ohio Environmental Council later left the Consortium, and the Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center joined.

The annual number of participants in programs has reached 17,000 in most recent years.

The Midwest Consortium completed successfully for continued funding in 1990, 1993, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015 under the leadership of Dr. Rice at the University of Cincinnati. These achievements resulted from dedicated trainers who implemented novel programming, followed NIEHS-reviewed curricula that incorporate hands-on and interactive adult education approaches, and collected vital evaluation feedback to document value and provide the basis for new programming. Trainers are the core of the Midwest Consortium and proud champions of using NIEHS funds to go beyond routine 'check-the-box' training.

Continued funding has depended on documentation that the federal funds are well-spent. How was this achieved? NIEHS is strongly committed to aspects of the Worker Training Program that set it apart from off-the-shelf programs. NIEHS personnel consistently refer to the Worker Training Program as model programs, exemplifying the best in worker training. Elements identified by NIEHS which define model programs include:

- Participatory learning
- Serving the underserved
- Innovative evaluation
- Changes in the workplace
- Trainer growth
- Curricula innovation

Operationalizing these elements has allowed the Consortium to document quality and impact; these data assist NIEHS in securing funds for continuation of the program. Careful attention to these elements contributes to the ability of NIEHS to market the program to decision makers.

### Moving into the Future

Training provides a foundation for building capacity among participants to implement improved health and safety. In the 2015-2020 funding period, the MWC used feedback received during the previous five years to continue to innovate. New initiatives included building resiliency at employment sites and in the community and providing options for refresher programs through spaced learning including tailored drills and flipped learning as well as modular refresher programs. By documenting the results from these initiatives in research publications, the Consortium added to the overall understanding of effective worker training methods, underscoring a commitment to effective, model training programs. Findings demonstrated that model programs are valued by participants, employers, and decision makers.

With a successful renewal of funding in 2020, Consortium leadership transitioned from Dr. Rice and the University of Cincinnati to Dr. Peter Raynor and the University of Minnesota. Dr. Raynor is a professor in the School of Public Health at the University. This transition began in 2016, with the assistance and oversight of the Consortium's External Advisory Board and NIEHS.

During the 2020-2025 award period, the overall aims for the Midwest Consortium are to facilitate delivery of model programs at training centers, enable training of diverse groups of participants who will not otherwise receive enough training about hazardous substances, and continually evaluate and improve the delivery of the worker and community training. The Consortium will continue to develop training innovations and integrate them into new and existing programs, implement new model training programs related to opioids and worker health, and strengthen and extend existing, locally-relevant resilience projects created at each training center. In addition, the Consortium will develop and deliver innovative training related to natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic.