

Environmental stewardship in action at tank farms

Something just didn't smell right that night.

Late in January, saltwell-pumping operators Darin Ebberson and John Senger of CH2M HILL Hanford Group were working on the water tank north of the 242-S Evaporator in 200 West. They noticed an unusual odor and stopped what they were doing to investigate.

They found that a hose between a portable diesel-fuel tank and an air compressor had pulled loose and allowed about 200 gallons of diesel fuel to leak onto the ground. They immediately notified Central Command and Control and remained on the scene to assist in the spill response by CCC, other saltwell operators and the Hanford Fire Department.

"It takes a lot of people in the right places," said Ebberson, recalling the flurry of activities that night. The area was barricaded off with stanchions and caution tape by Glenda Davis, Bill Guidice, B.J. Dabling and John Lund of CCC, Carl Schroeder of Environment, Safety, Health and Quality, and James Petty, Stan Eubanks, Senger and Ebberson of Interim Stabilization.

John Guberski, the environmental on-call representative for CH2M HILL, responded to the scene and directed the application of absorbent to soak up freestanding diesel fuel before any more of the fuel soaked into the ground. "It all went the way our training prepared us," said Senger.

"This response is a great example of environmental stewardship plus professional conduct of operations," said Bill Dixon, CH2M HILL Environmental Services director. "The operators could have easily ignored the unusual smell and continued with their assigned work. Instead, their inquisitiveness led them to discover and help mitigate a potentially significant environmental problem."

CH2M HILL Environmental Services employees are working with Waste Management and Operations personnel to clean up the spill site. Traditionally, soil contaminated with spilled petroleum products is dug up, drummed and sent to a commercial hazardous-waste site for incineration or disposal. This approach generates more hazardous waste to be managed at significant cost.

"We are using a more environmentally friendly and less costly 'bioremediation' approach," said Dixon. "What this means is we're digging up the diesel-contaminated soil, putting the soil into a lined pile and will mix it with uncontaminated soil and animal manure."

Dixon explained that natural bacteria in the soil and manure eat the diesel fuel, a process that could take as long as a year but could save as much as \$300,000.

"The spill of diesel fuel is an unfortunate insult to the natural environment," said Dixon. "However, this event teaches us that by practicing environmental stewardship at the tank farms, we can accomplish our mission to close tanks while also protecting and enhancing the environment."

The CH2M HILL Hanford Group mission is to clean up the tank farms and remove significant hazards to workers, the public and the environment. So the company's core work is environmental stewardship. Sometime in the future, the cleanup work could free up major portions of the site for other uses.

"Our job is to do no further harm to the environment while removing and stabilizing radioactive and chemical contaminants so they don't move into the groundwater and the Columbia River," said Dixon. "Cleanup is being done because the contents of the tanks represent a long-range risk to the groundwater and the river." ■



John Senger, left, and Darin Ebberson came across spilled diesel fuel at the water tower behind them in 200 West. They followed the procedures they had learned in training to help others mitigate an environmental problem. The hole around them is where contaminated soil from the spill had been removed when this photo was taken.