

Tank Farms raises new crop of operations engineers

Becky Curtis, CHG

Six CH2M HILL Hanford Group employees recently completed an eight-week course, the first step in becoming tank-farm operations engineers. They are Evelyn Brooks, Glenda Davis, Benjie McGee, Patrick McGuire, John Senger and Jack Thurman.

The operations engineering course covers facility-specific operations, procedures, the authorization basis and work control. A subject-matter expert or guest lecturer often accompanies the instructor. The course is usually given only once per year.

“It was a lot of work, but I learned something new every day,” McGee said.

Now that their classroom education is complete, the course graduates will be mentored by shift managers to complete their job qualification process. Each will be assigned to an area such as Tank Farms Operations, construction projects or work control.

During this field training period, the prospective operations engineers will need to obtain as many as 800 signatures verifying their qualification on tank-farm systems and processes. Finally, they must pass an oral examination given by a board of four or five senior tank-farm-qualified operating engineers.

“The operations engineering class is the basic building block for tank-farm operations,” said Dale Allen, CHG senior vice president of Operations. “Over the next few months we will be training additional operations engineers as we continue to improve our conduct of operations.”

Fully certified operations engineers are eligible to become shift managers. They may be assigned to work in central command and control, facilities, projects, waste transfers or any number of other areas within the tank farms.

Candidates for the program are identified by management when CHG has a need for operations engineers. About 60 employees from all backgrounds and all levels of tank-farm knowledge have graduated from the operations engineering program so far. Newly hired nuclear engineers with U.S. Navy or commercial nuclear backgrounds are also scheduled to complete the training program.

“We look for people with initiative — people who can identify problems and find solutions,” said Dan Niebuhr, first-line supervisor for Single-Shell-Tank Facility Operations. “The operations engineering program is tough, but when you complete it, you are qualified to do the job.”

“I’m always impressed with the students that are selected to participate in this program,” said trainer Dennis Kubie. “And I’m even more impressed with the transformation that occurs as they progress towards and finally pass their oral boards. They’re a cut above.” ♦