



Each year*, WTP funds training for:



Almost **2,000** workers overall.



Delivery of more than **26,000** contact hours.



Populations including Alaska Natives, American Indians, and communities experiencing environmental or socioeconomic challenges.



Delivery of more than **65** health and safety courses.



Delivery of training on a variety of topics, including confined space, emergency response, oil spill response, infectious disease awareness, adult CPR, HAZMAT chemistry, and basic first aid.

* Some training metrics for 2020 and 2021 were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Worker Training Program: Alaska

A National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) Superfund-Related Activity

The NIEHS Worker Training Program (WTP) funds nonprofit organizations to provide health and safety training for workers who may be exposed to hazardous materials (HAZMAT) and waste at work or while assisting with emergency response situations. WTP is authorized by the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986 (42 USC 9660a). WTP award recipients provide Superfund-related training across the country through the [Hazardous Waste](#), [HAZMAT Disaster](#), and [Environmental Career](#) Worker Training Programs and non-Superfund related activities through the [NIEHS/DOE Nuclear Worker Training Program](#).

Training Highlights

Supporting Remote Tribal Communities

Tribal governments and residents in remote Alaskan communities often face increased risks for environmental contamination due to a shortage of trained waste management technicians. To address this worker shortage, award recipients funded by the [NIEHS Environmental Career Worker Training Program \(ECWTP\)](#) deliver job training to workers as part of WTP's mission to build capacity among American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Many ECWTP job training efforts in Alaska are provided by the [Western Region Universities Consortium \(WRUC\)](#) through a partnership with Zender Environmental Health and Research Group (Zender) and their Rural Alaska Community Education Job Training (RACEJT) Program. The program is designed to train Alaska Natives to conduct environmental remediation work in their home villages.



Students from the 2022-2023 RACEJT cohort with Zender staff. (Photo courtesy of Zender Environmental)

- Zender recruits program participants from across the state to participate in a six-week training program in Anchorage, Alaska.
- WRUC member University of Washington provides courses to RACEJT participants on hazardous waste operations, general construction safety, and confined space entry and rescue.
- RACEJT program graduates return to their villages to work as environmental technicians, emergency spill responders, home fuel tank inspectors, and more.

Trainee Success Story from Rural Alaska



ECWTP graduates Nathan MacDonald and Candice Saunders-MacDonald.
(Photo courtesy of Zender Environmental)

Candice Saunders-MacDonald and Nathan MacDonald were underemployed when they first came to RACEJT, but they left the program with employable skills – and a spouse, as the two later married. Following their training, Candice and Nathan graduated and began working in environmental remediation in their village of Allakaket, AK, a subsistence community with a population of 200.

Candice works as the environmental coordinator for the community, and Nathan is employed by Alaska Earth Science, a local employer testing for environmental contaminants in the area.

Providing Safety Training for Native Alaskans

WTP award recipients provide hazardous waste operations and emergency response (HAZWOPER), disaster preparedness, and other environmental training courses for workers in Alaska.

- WRUC collaborates with the Alaska Forum's Environmental Training and Apprenticeship Program to provide HAZWOPER training and refresher courses to Alaska Natives. The trainings help participants meet the requirements of employers offering environmental and natural resource-related jobs in the state. Recently, trainings were offered in Glennallen, Savoonga, Gambell, White Mountain, Elim, and Soldotna.
- In the Native Village of Saint Michael, home to a former military base and Superfund site, the University of Washington provides annual 24-hr HAZWOPER and refresher courses to residents, many of whom are Yup'ik. HAZWOPER training is needed by residents to remove tar and spilled fuel left from the Gold Rush era at the Superfund site.
- In Anchorage, the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) delivered a 40-hour Confined Space Rescue course to first responders in 2021 to address the challenges of rescuing individuals from confined spaces like industrial tanks, pipelines, and underground facilities. In 2024, IAFF also delivered an 80-hour HAZMAT Technician course which was attended by both Anchorage responders and firefighters from Wasilla, Alaska, who traveled from their village to participate. The course included response scenarios to prepare Alaskan residents and responders for routine and large-scale emergencies.



Anchorage firefighters participating in a hands-on training session in 2024. (Photo courtesy of IAFF)

Community College Training

Other award recipients leverage partnerships with community colleges to reach and deliver training to Alaska workers and villages.

- The [Community College Consortium for Health and Safety Training](#) (CCCHST) – sponsored by the Partnership for Environmental Technology Education, and the Hazardous Materials Training and Research Institute – worked with Alyeska's Ship Escort Response System to provide annual oil spill and emergency response training to over 1,000 fishermen, many of whom are Alaska Native or Indigenous. This partnership allowed crews from Prince William Sound, Kodiak, Kenai, Seward, and Howard to refresh their skills in deploying, operating, and maintaining oil spill equipment. Prince William Sound College offered the oil spill first responders course to vessel crews as part of CCCHST for over 30 years.

Adapting to Emergencies and Disasters

During the COVID-19 pandemic, WTP award recipients and their partners adapted their in-person trainings to virtual platforms.

- The International Chemical Workers Union Council partnered with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) to adapt materials from the NIEHS COVID-19 Training Tool for Department of Public Works, Parks and Recreation, school support staff, and healthcare workers in Alaska. AFSCME also hosted eight 2-hour COVID-19 trainings online and provided CPR, AED, wildfire response, and First Aid training programs in Alaska. They have also worked with the Alaska State Employees Association to assess further training needs.
- In November 2022, Typhoon Merbok struck the west coast of Alaska, causing significant damage to villages in its path. To aid in disaster cleanup, Zender worked with Tribal contacts to create customized lists of emergency cleanup supplies for eight villages hardest hit by Merbok, including Golovin, Hooper Bay, Nome, Unalakleet, Koyuk, Kotlik, Napaskiak, and Kipnuk. Zender and the University of Washington sent disaster cleanup supplies to these villages, and they continue to remain in contact with ECWTP graduates in affected villages to monitor cleanup progress, provide training, and send additional supplies.