National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences
*Worker Training Program*

# Providing Worker Health and Safety Training to Prepare for and Respond to Disasters

*FEMA News Photo*

The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) Worker Training Program (WTP) has responded to numerous disasters in its 30-year history. It provides support for health and safety training of workers engaged in hazardous waste removal, containment, transportation, or emergency response on an ongoing basis. And it has played key roles in the recovery efforts following such major disasters as Hurricanes Sandy and Katrina.

Perhaps in no other disaster has the need to ensure recovery workers can safely deal with harmful substances been greater than in the aftermath of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma. From cleaning up chemical plants and oil refineries to thousands of homes and commercial buildings, the health risks are substantial.

The program's network of grantees provide just-in-time awareness-level training targeted to specific types of cleanup efforts and populations. Through Train-the-Trainer courses they build local capacity to provide training to workers and communities. WTP's National Clearinghouse for Worker Safety and Health Training maintains numerous training materials for disasters that can be used immediately.

Specifically, the training technical assistance WTP can provide includes:

- Site-specific health and safety training to worker and community audiences, including instruction related to particular hazards, such as mold, lead, asbestos, and general hurricane and flood hazards
- Instructional staff, curriculum-development experts, and subject-matter experts.
- Safety training targeted to the unique needs of specific populations of workers, reflecting cultural and language needs and tasks performed.
- Training on the proper use of essential Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), or safety gear, including respirator-fit testing.
- Facilitation of training of vulnerable worker populations, such as day laborers and everyday citizens, through community organizations.
- Curricula and instructor resources for workers and responders.

## Training Tools and Resources

WTP's ***National Clearinghouse*** has a wealth of training tools and pocket booklets that can be used in special courses or as guides by on-site frontline workers. Examples of topics covered include:

- Hurricanes
- Floods
- Chemical incidents
- Oil spills
- Mold cleanup
- Debris removal

A disaster preparedness mobile app puts a full suite of training courses at the fingertips of workers exposed to hazards. And the Clearinghouse ***Hurricanes and Floods website*** provides access to these resources.

## A Track Record of Responses

For three decades, WTP has played a critical role in responses following disasters. In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, for example, it prepared and trained cleanup workers, homeowners, and volunteers on the hazards they faced working in debris removal, gutting, mucking, and mold remediation. Special mold guidelines and training were developed then. Nearly 1,000 people were trained through WTP awardees in just the first six months of its post-Sandy work.

Following Hurricane Katrina, WTP was designated as the coordinating agency for OSHA's health and safety response plan and set up a field office in Baton Rouge. Its hurricane response training booklet was developed during this period.

**For more information, contact the National Clearinghouse at 202-331-7733 or wetpclear@niehs.nih.gov.**