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Washington River Protection Solutions honored for lifesaving innovation

RICHLAND, Wash. – Washington River Protection Solutions (WRPS) was recognized this week for helping develop a face shield that protects a worker wearing full-face respiratory equipment from an arc flash, a type of electrical explosion or discharge where temperatures can reach 36,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

WRPS, the Hanford tank operations contractor for the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of River Protection, received the VPP Innovation Award at the Voluntary Protection Program Participants' Association (VPPPA) national conference in Kissimmee, Fla.

The company also was awarded the VPP Star of Excellence Award for maintaining a total recordable injury case rate 75 percent lower than the industry average.

"WRPS is honored to be recognized by the VPPPA, a true leader in the safety and health industry," said Mark Lindholm, WRPS president and project manager. "These awards demonstrate our employees' dedication to working safely on a daily basis and their never ending pursuit of equipment and methods that can improve worker safety."

An arc flash results in a hot blinding flash of light and a deafening noise. An enormous amount of concentrated energy is forced outward from the electrical equipment toward the worker, spreading hot gases and molten metal.

David Kuster, one of several WRPS electricians who worked with the vendor and the testing laboratories throughout the development process, called the product a game-changer.

"In the past, workers had to weigh the hazards and choose whether to wear respiratory protection or arc flash protection. Now, we don't have to make that decision," said Kuster, who, along with fellow WRPS electrician Ramon Riojas, gave a presentation on the face shield at the national conference.

In addition to the electricians, WRPS safety professionals, management and representatives from the U.S. Department of Energy contributed to developing the product, which is being used by all WRPS electricians and some other Hanford contractors. The face shield is also available for commercial use.

Lindholm said he is proud of the teamwork. "It began with workers questioning whether there was a better way to guard against arc flashes and resulted in a product that can save lives," he said.

This marks the second consecutive year WRPS has won both the Innovation Award and the VPP Star of Excellence Award. Last year, the company was honored for developing a tool that reduces worker exposure during surveys of radioactive equipment used to retrieve tank waste.

The national conference brings together safety and health experts from more than 400 different industries committed to occupational safety and health excellence. VPPPA is a member-based association with a network of more than 2,500 companies and worksites that are involved in or in the process of applying to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's or DOE's Voluntary Protection Programs. WRPS was awarded VPP Star status in 2014.

About WRPS

WRPS is a limited liability corporation owned by AECOM and Atkins, with AREVA as its primary subcontractor. The company's mission is to reduce the environmental risk posed by 56 million gallons of radioactive and chemical waste stored in 177 underground tanks near the center of the 586-square-mile Hanford Site in southeastern Washington state.

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