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Strong WRPS safety culture keeping workers safe, drawing national attention

RICHLAND, Wash. – Employees of Washington River Protection Solutions (WRPS) are working safer than any time since safety statistics have been available for the Hanford tank farms, since the beginning of 1991.

WRPS recently surpassed 7.1 million hours without a lost workday injury, a record stretch for the company. The achievement has continued to accumulate as employees stay focused on working safely. As of July 31, WRPS had eclipsed 7.6 million safe hours or 539 days without a lost-time injury.

“This puts us among the safest performing contractors in the DOE complex, despite the challenges and hazards we face every day,” said Mark Lindholm, WRPS president and project manager.

He said WRPS has become nationally recognized for innovative safety tools and programs, noting the company has earned three consecutive Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) Innovation Awards. The most recent, last year, was for establishing a physiological monitoring program that has helped eliminate heat stress cases the past two-plus years in the tank farms. A 2017 [Campbell Institute](#) Innovation Challenge award recognized the same achievement.

“The development and implementation of the monitoring program was realized because of employee engagement, teamwork and a strong commitment to safety,” Lindholm said.

WRPS also won the Project Management Institute’s [Project of the Year](#) award in 2017 for its work to safely remove radioactive waste from an underground storage tank at the Hanford site.

The company won the 2016 VPP Innovation Award for developing a face shield that protects a worker wearing full face respiratory equipment from an arc flash, and the 2015 award for developing a tool to help reduce worker exposure during surveys of radioactive equipment used to retrieve tank waste.

WRPS has been a DOE VPP Star Site since 2014, which is the federal government’s highest workplace safety designation. Star sites have injury and illness rates well below industry averages and exemplary safety and health programs.

A commitment from both workers and managers has helped create a strong safety culture that stresses personal responsibility but also emphasizes watching out for those around you, said WRPS Industrial Safety Manager Chris Thursby,

A byproduct of our safety culture is greater efficiency and progress, Lindholm said, which is key to WRPS achieving its goals on schedule while protecting workers and the environment.

WRPS is the Department of Energy's Office of River Protection's tank operations contractor at Hanford, responsible for safely managing the underground tanks storing radioactive and hazardous waste and for preparing for retrieval and treatment of that waste.

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