

The purpose of this webinar series is to provide a forum for WTP grantees and consortia members to share their challenges, solutions, demonstrations, and lessons learned while delivering engaging health and safety training during COVID-19. Each webinar is focused on topics raised during Phase 1 of the WTP COVID-19 needs assessment conducted in the spring. The audience for this series includes grantees and trainers who are delivering online and in-person instruction on a variety of health and safety topics. This webinar, the third call in the series, focused on protocols and practices for in-person training during COVID-19. Specifically, panelists covered the basics of safely holding in-person training during the pandemic. Policies from organizations currently delivering in-person training were discussed and trainers in the classroom shared lessons learned to help attendees understand and plan for the in-person experience. The facilitators for this presentation were Demia Wright and Pete Raynor.

The panelists included:

- **David Coffey**, Training Manager, The New England Consortium-Civil Service Employees Association
- **Elizabeth Del Re**, Principal Investigator, International Association of Fire Fighters
- **Kim Dunn**, Technical Training Director, Deep South Center for Environmental Justice
- **John Hanson**, Trainer, Lakeshore Technical College/Midwest Consortium for Hazardous Waste Worker Training
- **Tony Jimenez**, Program Manager, HAMMER Federal Training Center

The following section includes high-level summaries of the question and answer sequence that the facilitators and panelists engaged in:

- *Question 1: Do the firefighters have some written policy documents or tools that they are using now to guide in-person training?*
 - **Elizabeth:** Yes, we coordinated with our IAFF Health and Safety Department and EMS Department to create a Training Risk Assessment Tool. (This has been shared with Demia to share with the group). The goal was to be able to decipher between what training was essential versus non-essential, who would be delivering the training, and if the trainers felt comfortable delivering, are there local ordinances where the training will be held that may affect the training, is COVID-19 peaking at that location, etc.
- *Question 2: What the steps are you currently taking to prepare your facilities for in-person training?*
 - **Kim:** We divided our larger groups into smaller groups for trainings so that we could abide by 6-foot social distancing guidelines. Hand sanitizer stations were installed, we used disposable equipment, stressed the importance of hand washing, limited the number of breaks, and trainers were advised to not leave during their breaks. Trainers were also instructed on behaviors outside the training facilities, signs were posted, extra paper towel dispensers were installed, and wipes were used to wipe off high-traffic touchpoints. Doors were left open to space people out more and trainers were taught how to clean and cleaned the training spaces often throughout the day.
 - **Tony:** Everything was shut down and a plan was created to make sure that everyone was protected. A lot of the classrooms were eliminated and class sizes were reduced. Hands-on activities were modified to eliminate all touch points (i.e. QR codes instead of paper, iPads instead of handouts). Additionally, single points of entry/exit was created, social

distancing signage placed everywhere, urinals were taped off, air was cycled differently, single-use equipment was introduced, masks were mandated to be used nonstop, AV equipment was given to the trainer to help with projection, and the janitorial staff was increased by 3x to have staff there 24/7.

- *Question 3: What type of safety and policy orientation do you give trainees?*
 - **Tony:** With the worker trainers, they are given a briefing from Hammer management to inform them of the new policies and procedures that are in place. Breaks are staggered to limit interaction with other students that is not necessary. If they are a HAZWOPER grantee we have them come in two weeks before they have students so that dry runs can occur with Hammer staff/management. In total, 2-5 briefings occur and a dry run before the first day with actual students. For the students, they have already been briefed by their contractors, will be briefed again by their worker trainer, and watch a 5-10-minute video informing them of what Hammer is doing to keep them safe during training. If any students chose to not wear their masks properly, they are released from the training class.
 - **Kim:** For the trainers and students, we started doing a COVID-19 training because when the city shut down, they had a lot of questions. We put a policy in place utilizing the NIEHS Essential Worker Training and educated the trainers on what was expected and how to deal with someone who was sick. We shut down travel to some of the distance locations because everything was a hotspot. When we did open back up, we educated the trainers before they went back to the distance locations.
- *Question 4: What types of training are you offering and delivering in-person? How have you had to adjust the class experience since COVID-19?*
 - **John:** As a Technical College, we needed to follow the direction of our Incident Management Team that was formed in February. All their guidance aligns with mandates from the Governor and the County Board of Health. We had to implement risk management and ensure that trainings reflected the concerns of the customer and the College. Masks were required 100%, there was a single point of entry/exit, and signage was in place. Regarding training, there was a lot of preplanning to focus on social distancing and how hands-on training would be done. The courses offered include: HAZWOPER Initial Refresher, Confined Space Rescue. For some of the classes where it was not a practical way to do social distancing, we have them fit tested for N95s.
 - **Elizabeth:** We are doing the same classes that John is offering: Hazmat Operations, Hazmat Technician, Confined Space Rescue, and adding on a day for Emergency Response to Terrorism and Frontline Safety. We try to spread students out and use Zoom or other webinar platforms. In other places we have people do a portion of the classes on Zoom and do the practical exercises in-person. For trainings were not a lot of practicals are going on, we are putting together a committee to figure out how we can deliver those trainings virtually and provide professional virtual experiences. Other things to consider include, how to keep students who are in their gear engaged when the trainer must project during outside training sessions?
 - **Kim:** We were limited to some of the courses that we trained because the state wanted them to be in-person and did not make provisions for extending credentials. We mostly did 40-hour Hazwhoper, 24-hour Mold, and some refreshers for Asbestos and Lead

trainings. For the 40-hour we did the 24-hours via Zoom and for the 24-hour we did 16-hours via Zoom. We set up online demonstrations via Zoom of PPE and whatever other protective equipment was needed. After that, students either came to us or we drove to the training site and did the 16-hour and 8-hours where we donned PPE and did hands-on activities. The classes were small and had at most 7-8 students. Also, we only trained to Level C for Hazwoper. Students were given their own respirators as well and instructed on how to sanitize while doffing PPE for COVID training.

- *Question 5: What types of training are you offering in-person? How are you conducting aspects such as small group hands-on activities and the buddy system while incorporating COVID-19 health and safety protections?*
 - **Tony:** We had to reevaluate every hands-on activity, many were removed or modified. A lot of the new ideas turned into a scene evaluation. Students were in smaller groups going over a turnover tape prop, looking at placards, and they have ERG. Trainers are taking smaller groups and doing rotations to ensure they have six-foot distancing and no touchpoints. We still have some hands-on activities and no Level As. We brought in leadership and other safety professionals to approve the process and how we are conducting the training (i.e. social distancing and no cross-contamination). It took a lot of creativity with modifying the activities and discussion with the worker trainers to make it happen. Also, we are overly cautious when it comes to potential points of exposure and make sure that we constantly sanitize and take quarantine measures as needed.
- *Question 6: Do you have anything you would like to share about decontamination procedures?*
 - **John:** Yes. For example, with our Motorola radios, we had to call the manufacturer and ask for technical assistance since no decontamination guidance or technical bulletins came with the device. (This is important if you are unable to throw away the equipment but still need to make sure it is properly decontaminated). We also had to develop abatement plans prior to the trainings with the customer/client when going out on the road.
- *Question 7: Are there challenges that you faced with planning and implementing in-person training that have not yet been mentioned? How are you facing completing all the cleaning requirements with limited resources, if they are limited?*
 - **John:** We have housekeeping staff on campus. It is each Building Dean's responsibility to designate staff to go through every three hours and disinfect all major touchpoints. After trainings, the trainers were responsible for disinfecting the classroom. Housekeeping staff will follow-up on-demand to clean as needed.
 - **Kim:** More responsibility is placed on the trainers and staff and they are trained on chemicals. Students are trained to help with cleaning as well. We ran into a challenge of staff and trainers having sensitivities to chemicals, so the application process of the chemicals had to be reexamined.
 - **Elizabeth:** The biggest challenge is that we are traveling to the various training locations. We have one person who is the Lead Instructor to make sure that the class is customized based on the departmental standards and local ordinances. They must remain flexible.
- *Question 8: Has anyone tried using virtual reality?*
 - **Kirk:** We will be working with the Community College District, who has a Virtual Reality Lab, to develop some scenarios in a gaming platform and create exercises that the

students can use. Not sure of the software that will be used but we are in the beginning phase of that.

- **Tony:** Prior to COVID we wanted to a module with virtual reality, but we could not figure out the proper way to clean the equipment and who would clean it. The other issue was with the load if every student had it and our system capabilities. If you go down that route, consider that. Before that, we had the instructor use an oculus that was projecting to the screen. The students could see it, but it did not have the impact we were hoping for.
- *Question 9: How and where are students eating lunch? What are the protocols for that?*
 - **Tony:** Students can go to their car, but we did create space in the warehouse for students to eat on a rotating basis and socially distance 8-feet apart. All students are not centrally located in the same building at the same time. During lunch and drinking is the only time that masks can be removed. We have managers that monitor students who are talking in the hallway to make sure that they do not remove their masks. Most students prefer to go to their car during lunch though.
 - **John:** Lunch is conducted the same way it has been all along. We do have physical distancing, but we eat as we normally would, just face down.
 - **Kim:** Individual lunch (either plate of bagged lunch) is brought in and they may go to the car with it. We discourage students from leaving the site.
- *Question 10: With the increased shift to PPE and more of it being used, is waste stored, then disposed or is special handling done?*
 - **Tony:** Anything that has the potential to be reused is set aside a week prior and isolated before the student receives it. Trainers pass out materials gloved. For one-time use items, they are properly disposed of in a bag by a janitor with PPE on.
- *Question 11: Has anyone dealt with issues related to limited cleaning supplies?*
 - **John:** I have not run into the problem, but we have a network of people we can reach out to so we can get what we need.
 - **Kim:** We have not had an issue. We have just had to shop around and find what we need.
- *Question 12: With a de-emphasis on contact as means of transmission and a greater emphasis on aerosol transmission, are people adjusting their plans to focus more on aerosols and less on contact?*
 - **John:** We use masks. We plan to be proactive in trying to minimize aerosols transmission through the air. We are minimizing the risk, not preventing it. Facilities personnel can also help with air handling units in areas with close quarters or where air needs to be moving more.
 - **Tony:** Everyone wears a mask. If the instructor is having issues with that, we can rearrange AV equipment to better suit them.
- *Question 13: How many of the panelists, or anyone else, are currently using Level As for training exercises in Initial Emergency Response training?*
 - **John:** We are using Level A suits and we have the laundering equipment for them. They are sprayed down, set aside for three days, and then washed in a normal detergent cycle.
 - **Tony:** We moved to single time use suits. The students will unwrap it and when they are done, it will go in the trash.
 - **Kim:** We are only doing Level C and we individually hand them out to the students.

- *Question 14: Anyone else is the audience who has done in-person training and want to comment on the questions?*
 - **Kenny:** We have restarted in-person training and Hazmat Technician training with Level As. We issue individual Level As to each student and disposable suits for different levels. Students who are not disposing of their suits, spray them down and load them into the trailer where they sit for three days before they are re-washed and re-packed before use.
 - **John:** We are trying to make sure that people are not picking up contaminating from the suit that is being reused. We also must be proactive in pre-screening the students as well to limit asymptomatic transmission.
- *Question 15: Is anyone using the fogger disinfection on equipment during training?*
 - **Pete:** Some training centers in the Midwest Consortium that are trying to use HVLP sprayers or electrostatic spraying of surfaces to limit the amount of disinfectant being used. The electrostatic sprayer is hard to find though. Amber made a comment about working for a fogging company and the best results include closing off all vents and HVAC, which is imprudent during this time.
 - **John:** We used to use the fogging equipment, but we have suspended that for now.
 - **Amber:** Hydrogen peroxide vapor is the most effective, but the requirements are that you seal the room if you cannot get to the HVAC. The OSHA limit is 1ppm which takes one hour to dissipate. Any carbohydrate-based material (i.e. cardboard, paper, eraser boards, etc.) will absorb the hydrogen peroxide and it will not disinfect. Given that, it is not ideal in a classroom environment, but better in a hospital.
- *Question 16: How is the resilience and mental health of trainers when going through different and stressful procedures to stay safe?*
 - **Tony:** We check on our trainers every day. Since we are limited on the number of trainings, we have them training for a long time. The training cycles have been altered. The hardest week of the month is training, and it is now three weeks training and one week in the field. We put in checks to see how they are, make sure they are taking time off to reset, and deal with the difficult students that may come to the trainings.
 - **John Morawetz:** For the staff at the Training Center, this is a significant issue. We instituted a Zoom meeting every two weeks to check-in and ask them about their life and what are they are doing to deal with the stress. This is an issue of staff mental health during a pandemic, it is bigger than just a training issue.
 - **Elizabeth:** The IAFF has a Resiliency Program that is typically an instructor-led, face-to-face type training. The requests for it have increased, so they are now conducting these trainings via Zoom. People need to stay vigilant, realize this a changing environment, and the stressors can have a long-term impact.

All calls/webinars were recorded and posted on the COVID-19 Webinars and Presentations web page: <https://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp/index.cfm?id=2592>.