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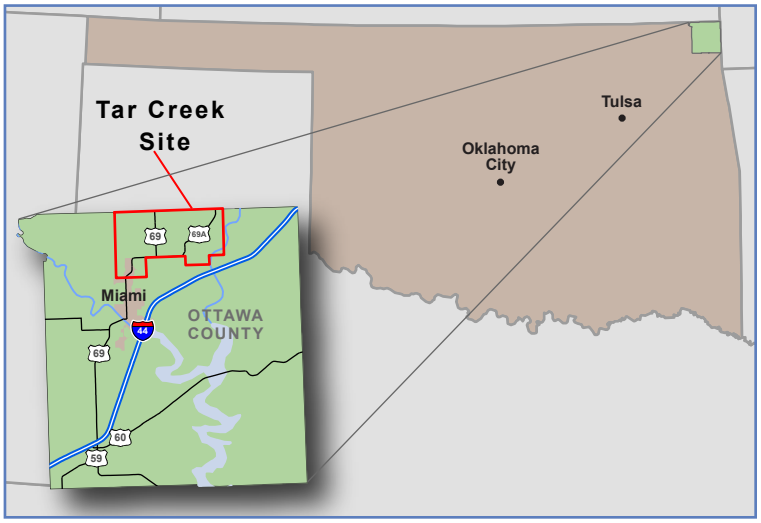
MAKING A *DIFFERENCE* IN THE COMMUNITY:
The Superfund Job Training Initiative in Ottawa County, Oklahoma





INTRODUCTION

The Tar Creek Superfund Job Training Initiative (SuperJTI) is an environmental remediation job readiness program that provided career development opportunities for 26 trainees living near the Tar Creek Superfund site. Through a partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the L.E.A.D. Agency, the Northeast Technology Center at Afton and CH2M Hill, Tar Creek SuperJTI provided local job-seekers with new skills and work experience linked to the cleanup of the Tar Creek site. EPA's goal is to help the community create job opportunities and partnerships that remain in place for the long-term.




CANDIDATE OUTREACH, RECRUITMENT AND SCREENING: MARCH 2010

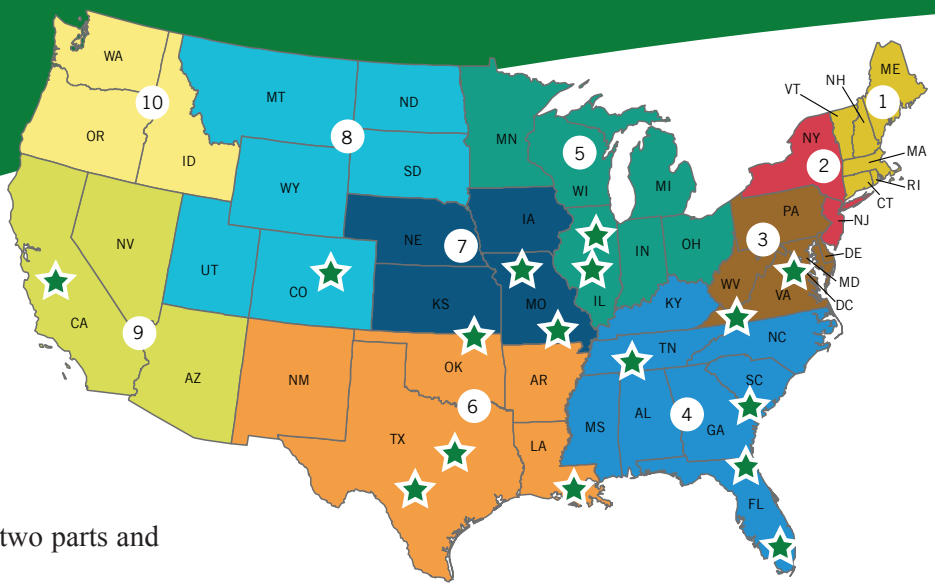
Tar Creek SuperJTI staff and community partner the L.E.A.D. Agency created a hotline, distributed fliers and hosted orientation sessions to publicize the job training program and attract interested candidates. Local radio stations and Workforce Oklahoma also publicized the program. During March and April 2010, 412 individuals contacted the hotline and 248 interested candidates attended the program's three orientation sessions. Following these sessions, 111 people completed a preliminary testing stage and 51 of those participants were invited to attend the program's tryouts. Thirty-five participants decided to continue with the program tryouts.

Program tryouts were conducted over two days and included leadership, team building and role-playing activities, basic physical fitness evaluation, and observation by a team of 10 evaluators representing the project's partners. Following the tryouts, 26 trainees were selected.

SITE HISTORY

Underground mining for lead and zinc in northeastern Oklahoma began in 1891. Following decades of productive mining, major mining operations ceased in the early 1970s. The mining era left a legacy of open mine shafts, acid mine water, areas prone to subsidence, and large volumes of mining and milling wastes contaminated with lead, zinc and cadmium. The site was listed on EPA's National Priorities List (NPL) of top-priority Superfund sites in September 1983. The site consists of approximately 43 square miles (27,520 acres) and is part of the Tri-State Mining District, which includes parts of northeastern Oklahoma, southeastern Kansas, and southwestern Missouri.

To date, the site's cleanup has included relocation of some residents and the excavation of lead-contaminated soils from over 2,295 residential yards and high-access areas located within the five-city mining area, which includes the historic mining towns of Picher, Cardin and Hockerville. Other cleanup activities have included surface water management and the plugging of abandoned wells. These activities have significantly reduced the exposure of the population, especially young children. Residential relocation and the cleanup of mining and milling wastes are ongoing. Longer-term cleanup of the area's groundwater is expected to take several decades, with completion by approximately 2040.



Tar Creek SuperJTI is one of the many SuperJTI projects nationwide that are making a difference for underserved citizens living in communities affected by Superfund sites.

TRAINING: APRIL 2010

The Tar Creek SuperJTI training consisted of two parts and took place over the course of three weeks.

- ***Pre-Employment and Lifeskills Training:*** Trainees completed courses in career planning, interpersonal communication, money management and effective work habits. The training was provided by project partner Northeast Technology Center.
- ***Technical Training:*** Trainees completed the 40-hour Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) training, asbestos and lead abatement training, and CPR and first aid training. The training was provided and partially coordinated by the Northeast Technology Center.

Upon completion of the program, trainees possess the marketable skills needed to begin a successful career in environmental remediation and become valuable members of the workforce in these communities.

Graduation for the program's 26 trainees was held at the Miami Civic Center in Miami, Oklahoma in June 2010. TASC National Program Manager Karen L. Martin emceed the ceremony, which also included class awards and remarks from the graduates.

THE TAR CREEK SUPERJTI TRAINEES:

- ***Are a diverse group.*** The trainees include 8 Native Americans, 16 Caucasians, and 2 Hispanics. Six trainees are military veterans.
- ***Live predominantly in areas affected by the Superfund sites.*** Forty-six percent of the trainees (12 people) are relocated residents from the communities of Picher or Hockerville. Fifty-four percent of the trainees (14 people) live in areas surrounding the site.
- ***Include younger and older populations.*** Thirteen trainees are in their 30s or younger and 13 trainees are in their 40s or older.

JOB PLACEMENT AND FOLLOW-UP: JUNE 2010 – JUNE 2011

After graduation, trainees interviewed with CH2M Hill sub-contractors Etech for available site cleanup positions. Fourteen graduates have since been placed into a variety of positions including environmental technicians, dump truck drivers and heavy equipment operators. Remaining graduates will interview with site subcontractors as additional remediation contracts are awarded.

Tar Creek SuperJTI and L.E.A.D. Agency staff will conduct program follow-up with the graduates and their supervisors for one year after entering into employment. During this time period, graduates may change positions but are required to maintain employment, either with one of the site subcontractors or another employer.

TAR CREEK SUPERJTI COMMUNITY PROFILES: Making a Difference

Natasha McKibben

Natasha McKibben found the perfect opportunity in Tar Creek SuperJTI. This former Head Start teacher's aide first learned of the program from the Oklahoma Community Action Agency, decided to attend an orientation session, and was selected for the training after SuperJTI's rigorous selection process, which included several days of evaluations. McKibben and her husband both successfully completed the program in April 2010.

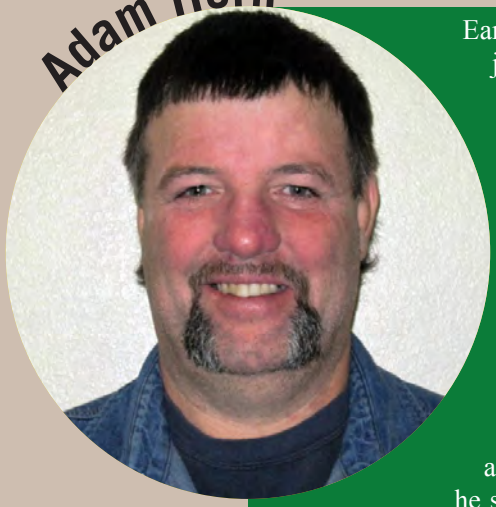
McKibben recalls particularly enjoying the training's interactive exercises, which fostered cooperation and teamwork among the program's 26 trainees. "I also found the classes so informative," she said, "particularly regarding issues of environmental justice as well as the technical aspects of lead abatement." McKibben, who grew up in nearby Miami, Oklahoma, now works for site sub-contractor Etech as a field technician, performing such tasks as setting up silt tents and marking off mine shafts. "It was a really good experience," she said. "With all the skills I learned, even if my current position were to end, I feel I would be able to be hired anywhere."

Virgil Tarter

Virgil Tarter is no stranger to hard work. Several years ago, Tarter built an entire home from scratch using his hands and his construction knowledge. So, when the former local government employee heard about Tar Creek SuperJTI through a newspaper advertisement, he pursued the opportunity immediately. Following interviews and participation in leadership, team building and role playing activities, Tarter was selected as one of the program's trainees.

An avid hunter and fisherman, Tarter has always been concerned about the condition of the natural world. "The classes taught us how to address hazardous waste issues and help protect our health and the environment," he said. "The [lifeskills] training has helped me manage my time and finances better." Tarter also distinguished himself as a leader during the training: his classmates requested that he speak at the program's June 2010 graduation. "It felt good to share our experiences with our families and friends," he reflected. Tarter is currently working as a remediation specialist for site contractor and project partner CH2MHill.

Adam Horn



Early one morning, Adam Horn got a call from his stepdaughter about an environmental job readiness program she had read about in the newspaper. Horn, a welder and coal miner by trade, had been unemployed for several months and was eager to learn more about Tar Creek SuperJTI. The problem: the orientation started in 30 minutes. He made it there in 20.

Selected as one of the program's trainees following tryouts, Horn immersed himself in Tar Creek SuperJTI's career planning, team-building exercises and technical training in environmental remediation. The training enabled Horn to build on and expand his professional skills. "I had previous experience managing some hazardous chemicals," he said. "Now, I am well-prepared to deal with a wide range of different situations and materials." Horn currently works as an equipment operator building roads that will transport contaminated wastes from abandoned lead and zinc mines at the site. "This is a career opportunity for me," he said. "I think if anyone is thinking about participating in the program, they should definitely do it. The skills you learn can be applied to a variety of jobs all over the country."

What is the SuperJTI Program?

The Superfund Job Training Initiative, or SuperJTI, supports job readiness programs in communities affected by nearby Superfund sites and encourages the employment of trainees at local site cleanups. The SuperJTI program combines extensive classroom instruction with hands-on work experience for each participant. Upon completion of the program, each participant possesses the marketable skills required to become a valuable member of the community's workforce. EPA offers SuperJTI training through its Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC) contract at no cost to training participants.

For more information, please visit:
www.epa.gov/superfund/community/sfjti

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