Los Alamos National Laboratory employees receive Pollution Prevention awards

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Protecting environment, saving taxpayer dollars

LOS ALAMOS, N.M., April 23, 2013—Nearly 400 Los Alamos National Laboratory employees on 47 teams received Pollution Prevention awards for protecting the environment and saving taxpayers more than $8 million. The employees were recognized at the Laboratory's annual Pollution Prevention Awards ceremony on Monday (April 22), Earth Day.

"The Pollution Prevention Awards are the result of people taking the initiative to improve their own operations," said Pat Gallagher of the Laboratory's Environmental Stewardship group. "These are clever, innovative, homegrown and home-owned ideas

that save the Laboratory and taxpayers millions of dollars each year while reducing impacts to the environment."

Five projects received the Lab's Best in Class Star Award for outstanding achievement. These projects will be submitted to the U.S. Department of Energy/National Nuclear Security Administration for national Pollution Prevention award consideration. They are:

- Acetone out, rhenium in: employees made changes to an acetone sample rinsing process, eliminating 48 liters of mixed low-level waste per year. Now the team separates a small rhenium metal ribbon from stainless steel posts and recycles the steel instead of disposing of the entire apparatus. This change also eliminates about 25 pounds of low-level waste per year.
- Streamlined plutonium operation: By changing the vessel shape for the process, which extracts americium from old plutonium so that the plutonium can be reused, this method generates less than half of the waste of the former process. The new approach also requires less salt and avoids the generation of more than 20 kilograms of mixed transuranic and low-level radioactive waste per year and an additional 80 kilograms from subsequent processes.
- Helium gas recovery and liquefaction: Installation of new recovery and liquefaction equipment at four processing points resulted in more than 72,000 liters of liquid helium being captured and reused producing an annual savings of more than $1 million.
- Halogen leak detection at DAHRT: Using a $1,000 pollution prevention grant, Rudy Valdez of Weapons Experiments Division purchased two handheld halogen leak detectors. Discovering leaks in the piping and repairing problem spots quickly is expected to prevent almost 700 pounds of sulfur hexafluoride from escaping every year. Saving this amount of sulfur hexafluoride is equivalent to eliminating more than 16 million pounds of carbon dioxide emissions per year.
- Radio monitoring saves hours, fuel, equipment: The Surface Water Program installed and activated a telemetry system for retrieving environmental data from remote stream gauge and rain gauge monitoring stations. The system provides real time data acquisition and reduces time spent in the field by more than 2,000 hours annually. In addition to notifying the field crews immediately if a gauge has been damaged, the new system reduces cycle times, saves mileage and wear on vehicles. The system is expected to save $1.2 million over the next 5 years.

See the complete list of Los Alamos's 2013 Pollution Prevention Award winners.