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# EPA Region 9 Brownfields Program Success Stories RichmondBUILD · Richmond, CA



## RichmondBUILDS Hope and Community through Training and Sustainable Jobs

### Project Description

**Organization:** RichmondBUILD Green Careers Academy

**Project Manager:** Nicholas Alexander

### Project Partners

EPA, DOL, City of Richmond (*Public Works Department, Redevelopment Agency, Housing Authority*), Building Trades Council, The San Francisco Foundation, Chevron, PG&E, Other Partners

### Education-Specific Partners

Contra Costa College, Literacy for Every Adult (*LEAP*) program



*Students and instructors foster positive relationships working through classroom examples*

***“We have what we consider to be a world class training program providing quality training for the individual that positively impacts not only that individual, but also their family and the community.”***

—Sal Vaca, Director of the Employment and Training Department for the City of Richmond

### Area History

During World War Two, Richmond, California was a center for heavy industry and petrochemical production. Since then many of the industries have shut down leaving behind high unemployment and poverty rates. In addition, the shuttering of industry and manufacturing in the area has left Richmond with over 321 acres of brownfields. With vacant, idle properties and high unemployment and poverty levels, Richmond is also one of the most violent cities in California with 1,176 violent crimes reported in the FBI Uniform Crime Reports for 2010. RichmondBUILD was established in 2007 as a strategy for reducing violence in the community while also helping its citizens gain knowledge and training to reduce unemployment and environmental risks in their community. In 2009, the organization received a \$500,000 Job Training Brownfields grant from EPA to train area students in environmental jobs.

RichmondBUILD Facility Manager, Nicholas Alexander, noted that the city has faced a “severe impact from the economic recession and with an unemployment rate of nearly 19 percent, the implementation of a Hazardous Materials job training program through RichmondBUILD Green Careers Academy could not have been more timely.” He further discussed that in this very competitive labor market, RichmondBUILD has managed to train and place over 100 people in employment, and the average hourly salary of the graduates is \$21.26—surpassing the original

### Highlights

- Graduation Rate: 94%
- Employment Rate: 80% for entire program; 70% for hazardous waste students
- Average Hourly Rate: \$21.26
- Core curriculum: 40-hour Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response; 32-hour Calif. Dept. of Public Health Lead Worker; 24-hour Asbestos Worker; Carpenter’s Pre-Apprenticeship (300 hrs)
- Degrees or certificates: 40hr Hazwoper (OSHA); 32hr Lead Worker (CDPH); 24hr Asbestos Worker (OSHA)

goal of \$20.00 per hour. Mr. Alexander stated that “[g]reen jobs involving the monitoring, transporting and cleanup of hazardous materials have been and will hopefully continue to be a tremendous source of opportunity in our community. RichmondBUILD’s strong partnership with EPA and the Richmond Redevelopment Agency has made it all possible.”

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## Project Results

The program has a high graduation rate; over 130 students have enrolled in the program since 2007 with 122 of those graduating. The program has an 80 percent job placement rate. The students can earn between \$12–\$36 per hour working as hazardous waste removal workers, emergency response team workers, construction laborers, crime scene cleanup workers, and quality assurance/quality control (QA/QC) technicians, among others. To qualify, prospective students need to be Richmond residents, 18 years or older, have a right to work status, and be able to pass basic math, reading and fitness tests. RichmondBUILD takes a multifaceted approach in assisting students in job placement including: local hire ordinance, union partnerships, leveraging related cleanup efforts/programs, staffing agencies, and direct placement. There is a one year follow-up with students who are placed in jobs. Students who have graduated the program have worked on jobs as diverse as: helping clean up the oil spill in the Gulf; removing hazardous materials from military fleets which are to be retired and dry docked in the Bay Area; and helping recycle electronics in California. Graduates have also worked on multiple EPA Brownfields and Superfund sites in California, including American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) grant recipient Mira Flores and the EPA Superfund site Naval Air Station Moffett Field.

In addition to job training, each student is assigned to a case manager who helps the student with problems, issues or challenges it may be facing relating to the course work or life. Basic life skills are incorporated into every course the student takes; this helps relate skills needed to succeed in life to jobs and tasks to be performed. The Richmond community has seen results from this training center and individuals who would normally be under- or unemployed are able to find jobs which offer higher than minimum wages. This program offers community members an alternative that is changing people's lives.

One such student is Keith Hardesty; who completed the Solar Energy Efficiency Design and Installation, Hazardous Waste Operation and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER), Asbestos Worker, and Lead Worker Training. Keith was homeless for three years and says “if not for RichmondBUILD, I would not have had the motivation to move forward.” He said RichmondBUILD provided training and paid all of his union fees and dues, all he had to do was “walk to the Center to build up my career, which was a big motivating factor.” The training and support he received at



Students practice decontamination as part of HAZWOPER Training

***“Everyone at RichmondBUILD are professionals, inspirations and absolutely ‘good’ for the Urban Communities.”***

—Keith Hardesty, RichmondBUILD Student

RichmondBUILD provides stability in his life. He says the staff is very encouraging; they have let him know he can come back for additional training or any other support he might need now or in the future. Keith is currently employed as an Environmental Health Laborer and he would encourage anyone who is going through a hard time or looking for work to go through this program or one like it, saying: “the work I am doing is environmental work, which is more frequent and will not likely go away.”

CALINC Training, LLC teaches several of the training courses at RichmondBUILD and indicates that the enthusiasm and dedication of the students who are part of the RichmondBUILD Program provides their instructors the opportunity to teach the Hazardous Materials classes with great success. Students are engaged, highly productive and anxious to learn all that the instructor has to teach and share. Instructors at CALINC Training have a great feeling of pride in contributing to the achievements of the students of the RichmondBUILD Program. They stated that “[i]t has been an honor for the instructors and administrative staff of CALINC Training to work with the RichmondBUILD Program knowing that each student is bettering themselves and going on to better the community with in which they live.”

For additional information, please contact:

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