



U.S. ARMY PUBLIC HEALTH COMMAND

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USAPHC Web-based courses save money, satisfy demand

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In an era of decreasing budgets and limited funds for travel, managers have struggled to find ways to ensure they keep a highly-trained and competent workforce.

But experts in the U.S. Army Public Health Command Occupational Health Sciences Portfolio are making it easier for Army workers to maintain credentials through use of an online training system called Blackboard Learn.

The system, employed at various institutions of higher learning across the U.S., is becoming a preferred training tool for many Army industrial hygiene and safety personnel. With this Web technology, subject-matter experts are able to deliver graduate-level training in 15 courses that are focused on core competencies in the Army safety and occupational health career program.

Courses include such topics as noise measurement and assessment; blueprint reading and design review; environmental and indoor air quality; fundamentals of ventilation; and ergonomics, just to name a few.

Each course is based upon competencies defined by the American Board of Industrial Hygiene, and many provide enrollees with continuing education units required to maintain certification in their respective career fields.

Students can view lectures and upload homework and assignments in Blackboard Learn as well as print materials for study and reference.

"Students no longer receive a large binder to carry home and place on a shelf," said Paula Steven, industrial hygiene training coordinator at the USAPHC.

"Blackboard Learn allows us to upload all materials, and attendees simply print what they personally need."

Steven is responsible for building and maintaining the educational materials posted in Blackboard Learn and enrolling students into courses.

The online training system also provides benefits for the instructors, according to Steven.

"Blackboard Learn keeps track of transcripts, certificates and course survey statistics, making the completion of reports much simpler for the coordinator," said Steven.

Although the majority of instruction is provided online, some course offerings also include blended learning, which offers a portion of the course in the Web-based environment, while the other aspect of the course includes hands-on training as residency work.

Additionally, the requirements for taking a course are not complex.

"Some of our residency courses have priority seating, but all of our online offerings are available to federal employees who have a 'dot-mil' email address, a DCO (Defense Connect Online) account, and a common access card," said Steven. "If an attendee is taking one of the courses or modules for the first time, there is a simple registration process that takes place in the Army Blackboard Learn to create a profile in the system."

Enrollment in these courses continues to trend upward.

"Our student population has increased from around 400 or 500 individuals to nearly 1,400 individuals since we started offering courses and modules on the Blackboard Learn," said Steven.

Although most of the attendees who take the courses are Army industrial hygiene staff members or safety professionals, the students are becoming more diverse according to Steven.

"We have attendees enrolled in our courses from a wide variety of governmental agencies," said Steven. "We have a population of National Guard safety professionals and Army and National Guard occupational health nurses that regularly attend our offerings. We have even noticed attendees from our sister services, Department of Homeland Security, and Defense Logistics Agency."

The Blackboard Learn courses also provide a benefit for the Army by reducing the amount of time spent traveling for courses as well as ensuring an efficient training process.

"We used to offer a course that required two weeks of residency for 20 students," said Steven. "Now with having one week of the course online, we accommodate 80 students for one week of residency and still end up spending less money. We can accommodate many more students at a much lower price without having to sacrifice the hands-on training."

The success of the Blackboard Learn system has prompted USAPHC personnel to offer additional courses.

"Our subject-matter experts are currently working on implementing approximately 48 new online modules focusing on a variety of instruments, ventilation topics, and different industrial work environments," said Steven.

In the future, the Blackboard Learn system can be expanded to cover courses to support other training programs.

Steven said the online courses demonstrate "out of the box" thinking for Army personnel.

"Having instructors who are willing to step out of their comfort zone and try something new has helped make Blackboard Learn successful," said Steven.

For more information, visit:

Public Health Command, <http://phc.amedd.army.mil/Pages/Training.aspx>

Blackboard Learn, <https://amedd.ellc.learn.army.mil>

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The U. S. Army Public Health Command focuses on promoting health and preventing disease, injury and disability in Soldiers and military retirees, their families and Army civilian employees. As well, the USAPHC is responsible for effective execution of full-spectrum veterinary services throughout the DOD. The USAPHC was created from the merger of the U. S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine and the U. S. Army Veterinary Command.