

DIRE NEED TO BUILD GLOBAL EHS CAPACITY LEADS TO MODULE-BASED TRAINING PROGRAM

The Phylmar Group, Inc. (Los Angeles, CA) is an environmental, health, and safety (EHS) consulting firm operating a network of more than 500 affiliates in 44 countries. Under this business model, the company matches qualified specialists around the world with EHS projects at Fortune 1000 clients that are aiming to incorporate sustainability into their core business processes. The Phylmar Group's network provides clients with a single point of contact for scoping, sourcing, contracting, and invoicing. In addition to their consulting work, the Phylmar Group provides environmental information and networking opportunities through the Phylmar Regulatory Roundtable (PRR) forums. Mark Katchen, Phylmar's managing principal, recently spoke to EBJ about his participation in an initiative designed to address a critical problem facing companies that wish to implement environmental and sustainability programs at facilities located in developing nations—the lack of adequate human resources.

Environmental Business Journal: We at EBJ have been hearing for many years that multinational corporations are aiming to establish a consistent, high level of environmental performance in all of their global locations, regardless of where they are and what the stringency of the local regulatory regime may be. Yet you've found that there is at least one serious hurdle to implementing strong environmental programs in places like China and other developing nations, having to do with personnel resources. Please describe that challenge.

Mark Katchen: The big issue has to do with the dearth of the right kind of people—the industrial hygienists that can help implement corporate environmental and sustainability programs. It's nice to have the desire to implement these programs, but the lack of resources makes it very difficult and in some cases almost impossible to do. Look at China, for example, which has 13 certified industrial hygienists in a country of 1.3 billion people.

This problem was recognized by people principally in the oil and chemical areas, as well as pharmaceuticals, about five years ago. Interestingly, it was BP that put up \$150,000 to explore the deployment of a set of training modules that had been developed by University of Wollongong in Australia. The university had developed these seven modules, each a week long, covering hazardous substance measurement control, asbestos, noise, and other factors related to industrial hygiene and safety.

The basic idea was that individuals who go through these training modules would be able to function at the technologist level within their organizations. They would operate relatively independently under the supervision of a professional industrial hygienist. Many multinational companies have health and safety personnel at the facility level, and they would develop plans to be reviewed by the corporate hygienist but then would be responsible for implementing the plans.

These modules are now available through the Occupational Hygiene Training Association (OHTA) using a shareware model. The modules are now up on the OHTA web site, and OHTA qualified trainers can pull them down and use them to train people. Each course ends with an exam that's administered by the British Occupational Hygiene Society.

What's exciting is, this may lead to the first globally recognized certification within occupational hygiene. There are seven certifying bodies in the world for industrial hygiene professionals; in the United States, it's the American Board of Industrial Hygiene. At least three of these boards—the Americans, the Canadians, and the British—have signed an MOU saying we'll work towards improving the level of training in occupational hygiene and to provide a recognized scheme for qualifications at the intermediate/technician level complementing the higher level professional qualifications. There may be others now.

That's kind of the goal, to get this moving. At the same time, some universities, like the University of Wollongong and a university in Chile, are looking at giving masters' level credit for these courses. So participants who want to go on to get graduate degrees are encouraged to do so.

The whole idea is to get this training to as many people as possible as quickly as possible, to get them out into the field faster when compared with a traditional academic process. A lot of the multinationals based in the U.S. and elsewhere are very interested in seeing this happen, to build resources that can help them implement their sustainability and environmental programs.

This particular model is something that's just beginning to be built out. The web site is OHlearning.com, run by the recently formed OHTA. It is part of the International Occupational Hygiene Association, which is an association of associations, including the various national associations. OHTA, which is basically the secretariat handling all of these courses, is part of that entity.

EBJ: What has been your involvement in this effort?

MK: In Shanghai this past June and July, we worked with the AIHA to pilot a course. I should back up a bit. I was international affairs committee chair for AIHA a couple of years ago, and we started looking at this program back then. It evolved slowly, and as I came off the chairmanship, I still wanted to see it through, so we decided to pilot one of these courses to see how it would go. We reached out to various sponsors, and we had one partner—General Electric of Asia. GE provided the facility to do the training, and a key benefit of this facility was and the access to pilot plants they had on site, so we could take the students on site and put equipment on real people. GE also helped promote the class by taking the information we provided and translating it into Mandarin and disseminating the course marketing materials throughout China. We had some other sponsors, like SKC, a maker of environmental monitoring equipment, and ESIS, part of ACE Insurance. NBC Universal was also a sponsor.

A total of 25 people participated in the course, from GE, Nike, ITT, United Technologies, Glaxo Smith-Klein, Converse, and some others. Most of these folks had environmental backgrounds to some degree, but not so much in industrial hygiene. A good many of the people who took the class were interested in continuing and participating in the other modules.

In terms of the shareware aspect of these modules, there's a certain flexibility benefit. We taught the course in Mandarin, but the manuals and slides were all in English. If we want to offer another course, we would be able to translate those materials into Mandarin, and they would become available to anyone who wanted them via the OHTA, once approved.

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EBJ: What would you say was the more important “take-away” from your experience in Shanghai?

M.K.: Aside from generating a lot of enthusiasm on the part of the participants, I think the biggest benefit of this approach was its advantage over the more traditional approach to capacity building. You can send people to graduate educational programs and colleges, but that takes a long time. That's why this approach was developed, to address that time issue.

The other advantage of a module-based program like this is that, because a lot of people have access to it, more people can be involved in the training process. And because it's presented through a shareware approach, it's being translated into Norwegian, Spanish, and other languages. It's a global effort. If you go to the OHlearning.com site, you can see where the courses are being offered, and when.

These modules will become even more effective training tools over time enabling

us to reach companies of varying sizes throughout the supply chain. The courses themselves were well designed. I should add that two of China's 13 industrial hygienists were teaching the course in Shanghai, in Mandarin, so that was very helpful.

EBJ: How does this type of capacity-building benefit the environmental consulting and engineering industry? What can the industry do to support such capacity-building?

MK: Basically, the more people with these skill sets, the more talent there is out there to implement the programs required by our clients. It certainly helps the Phylmar business model. We have a network of 500 affiliates in 44 countries, so for us, the way our business model works, a client may say they need something done in China, like an audit or some other project. We source, qualify, and contract with a local consultant to do that work, so the client doesn't have to worry about finding and vetting someone on a one-off basis. That's costly and can be risky.

So for us, the more people out there who are trained with these capabilities, the better. That certainly helps us, but it helps the consulting industry in general for much the same reason. The more talent and expertise out there, the better for everybody.

Of course, other consulting firms can do the training, and several firms have already been qualified by the OHTA to present the courses. Doing so can provide an additional revenue stream, but more importantly, it can generate a talent pool that they can access. Information is also available at OHlearning.com for those firms who want to qualify as training providers. Then they can help build the global talent pool that the industry so sorely needs. □

Environmental Industry Summit 2011

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