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Water Treatment Plant Offers Employment Opportunities

by Betsy Weiner

Building and completing a multi-million dollar water treatment plant in Nasiriyah poses many challenges under present security conditions, but training local workers to properly operate and maintain that plant introduces another set of challenges project contractors working in the Gulf Region South district of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Gulf Region Division (GRD) must meet.

The plant, designed to serve over 500,000 people in the Dhi Qar communities of Nasiriyah, Suq Ash Sheuk, al-Diwaya, al-Sh Gharraf., is a "world-class facility," according to Lt. Col. Dale Johnson, Adder area engineer, "and the largest water treatment facility in Iraq."



A contractor representative talks with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officers about training requirements to operate and maintain the equipment on one of five skimmer tanks at the Nasiriyah Water Treatment Plant. [ARMY PHOTO BY JAMES BULLINGER]

"The project contractor, Fluor-AMEC worked for 26 months without an on-site accident – that is 4.5 million man hour recordable lost work-day accident," he said. "We are looking for people to fill the technical employment positions."

The Ministries of Municipalities and Public Works (MMPW) will own the water treatment facility and it is recruiting for employment at the plant. Fluor-AMEC, according to the contract, must provide three months of training for plant operators and plant staff on all levels, said Dorr, GRD Project Contracting Office program manager.

"Training for the position is a 30-day program. People interested in employment must complete 30 days to be eligible for employment," he said. "The positions are for plant operators, maintenance crew, software and laborers."

Fluor-AMEC has successfully held the contract for other parts of Iraq, said Dorr, because of the support from the local government.

"This training is classroom and hands-on," Dorr said. "We have a three-month operational maintenance period so that when we commission the plant and the commissioning is complete, we have technicians working there doing on-the-job training with the local work force."

Dorr emphasized the importance of government support and added that diligence

and diligence is the answer to staffing the plant adequately with the properly trained individuals.

“The folks I have encountered are high quality people who care,” he said, “from both sides. We need to have more teamwork because on the projects where it does exist, we have a wonderful success rate. If we work on something together, people will be more motivated because they have invested time into the project.”

Johnson added that the training classes at the plant are a “perfect opportunity for Iraqis who have a technical background – in biology or engineering for example – or someone who has a degree to go out, learn a skill and function as a professional.”

James R. Long, project engineer for the water treatment plant, said that he met with the local representative for the MMPW in Baghdad to resolve some issues involving training attendance, which has been sporadic.

“The (representative) assured me that his ministry is working on these issues,” he said. “Part of the problem has been transportation because of the distance some trainees have to travel. The problem has been solved now and he came out to speak to one of the training classes. He encouraged all trainees to continue attending and awarded each a monetary stipend for their efforts thus far. This underscores the ministry’s support of our program.”

An Iraqi engineer who works for GRS noted that working at the water treatment facility offers inexperienced engineers an excellent place to begin their careers, and that these kinds of positions are important because they offer skill development.

“We have to make the young engineers understand that this is a good first step for them,” he said.

“The engineering students from the school in Nasiriyah often do internships in the summer, fixing pumps or working on oil generators. But this is an opportunity for a permanent job. And they receive a stipend to attend the training – this only encourages the beginning engineers.”

He underscored the need for training, not only in the engineering profession, but also for Iraq’s businessmen and potential project managers.

“The most effective thing we can have here in Iraq is training,” he said. “The problem right now is that no one is taking his role in our society. We are looking for people who care. This is what will make a difference for our country.”



As the Nasiriyah Water Treatment Plant nears completion, Iraqi plant technicians will train to operate and maintain complicated systems such as the consoles for the clarifier tanks. [ARMY PHOTO JAMES BULLINGER]

Note: Betsy Weiner is a Public Affairs Specialist for the Gulf Region South District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Iraq. For information contact James Bullinger, GRS public affairs officer, at (540) 665-2656 or email: james.bullinger@tac01.usace.army.mil. For information on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, visit www.grd.usace.army.mil.

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