



District employees get down, dirty for valuable soils training



Jacob Berkowitz, a research soils scientist at the Corps' Engineer Research and Development Center in Vicksburg, Miss., describes the process for evaluating soils during a March 20 training site visit to Pond 20, a former salt mining area, in San Diego Bay. (Photo by Greg Fuderer)

By Greg Fuderer

CARLSBAD, Calif. – Never ones to be chained to their desks, 20 regulators and biologists left the comfort and safety of their offices March 20 to slosh through mud and muck in their search for hydric soils at a former salt mining pond in San Diego Bay.

The trek into the field was part of a four-day training course for the scientists conducted by Jacob Berkowitz, a research soils engineer from the Corps' Engineer Research and Development Center in Vicksburg, Miss., and included representatives from the Corps' Los Angeles and San Francisco districts, the California Department of Fish and

Wildlife, and the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board.

"Regulators consider three parameters when determining the presence of wetlands: hydrology, where the water comes from and goes; vegetation, whether it's hydrophytic, or water oriented; and soil type," said Therese Bradford, chief the Los Angeles District's South Coast Branch in Regulatory Division. "Identifying hydric soils is a critical part of delineating wetlands, and the class focused on increasing their knowledge of soil science."

Determining soil type is an important step in establishing

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whether an area is a wetland, because that has a major impact on whether the Corps has jurisdiction. It also factors into the type and amount of mitigation required. Bradford said, however, that while most regulators have a strong scientific background, soils training may not necessarily be included in that list.

“Most of us don’t have in-depth soils training. We have botany or biology backgrounds,” Bradford said. “Very few people have even one soils class in college.”

“When people come to work for the Corps, they’re usually comfortable looking at vegetation charts,” she said. “This class is for them to get really comfortable looking at categories (of field data), and when they review things to ask, “Does it make sense?” and if not, to figure out why not. Improving knowledge on hydric soils can really raise our level of competence and allow us to better analyze what comes into our office.”

Bradford said the Carlsbad office recently received a permit application that indicated the presence of wetlands hydrology and vegetation, but an absence of hydric soils.

“When something meets two criteria,

but not a third, we say, ‘Hmm, I wonder why,’” Bradford said. “Sometimes it’s explainable and sometimes it’s not. We couldn’t explain it from our desks, so we came out and dug lots of pits, and we found hydric soils. Since this is actually a wetland, it changed from one type of mitigation to another, instead of from non-wetland to wetland.”

The technical training for hydric soils and wetland identification is funded by Corps Headquarters through the Wetlands Regulatory Assistance Program. The program provides support to regulatory staffs to ensure they have the technical expertise to identify wetlands in the field.

The WRAP program provides technical support addressing national and regional-level issues, such as the National Wetland Plant List, Regional Supplements to the 1987 Wetland Delineation Manual, and the Hydrogeomorphic (HGM) Approach to Assessing Wetland Function to improve accuracy and efficiency of wetland delineation procedures. Additionally, the program provides local support to Corps Districts facing specific technical challenges regarding wetlands and other water resources.

WRAP also provides trainings on Wetland Plant Identification and Arid



Iron depletion (seen as the rusty orange color) is a redoximorphic feature used to identify hydric soils. During field investigations, biologists look for identifiers such as these to help determine whether to classify an area as a wetland. (Photo by Greg Fuderer)

West Ordinary High Water taught by Bob Lichvar, a research ecologist at the ERDC Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory located in Hanover, N.H. These courses focus on major wetland plant families such as grasses, sedges, rushes and asters and on the basics of Ordinary High Water delineation, including the use of remote sensing materials and interpreting gage data.

The hydric soils and regional supplement training courses increase the employees’ technical proficiency and efficiency and result in more accurate and repeatable wetland delineations. Berkowitz said the high level of development in Southern California has affected and disturbed soils areas, posing technical challenges for regulatory staffs.

But, Berkowitz said, “We have strategies to deal with that in the wetland identification manual.”

Berkowitz, who has taught the courses for the past six years, stressed the importance of soils training for scientists with the Corps and with other regulatory agencies with whom the Corps shares

“We need to develop technical subject matter experts, because this is a key portion of the regulatory process, to identify where wetlands exist and what the boundaries of wetlands are,” Berkowitz said.



Berkowitz goes over soil samples with trainees at the site of a former salt mining pond in San Diego Bay, March 20. (Photo by Greg Fuderer)

Dear District Teammates:

During my recent travels and while visiting with people in the District, I’m reminded that many of us are starting spring rituals and, for those with school children, getting ready for a break. My wife, May, and I definitely change our routines to accommodate yard work, spring cleaning, and family excursions to have some fun and experience the vegetative rebirth and revival around California and the Southwest. We look forward to “regrouping” and being together.

The change in the weather and the greener landscapes are the perfect harbingers to Earth Day, which we observe as a nation, along with 192 other countries, every year on April 22. Looking back to 1970 and the very first Earth Day, reminds me of how much our country and our environmental attitudes have changed. Today, there is much more education surrounding environmental issues and proactive effort to make sustainability changes. And, I’m proud to see how the employees in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are incorporating “green” initiatives in our construction and planning efforts. Personally, I think about waste, recycling, pesticides, gas and electricity savings, and farm-to-table foods much more than my parents may have at my age. I believe if we all make small changes it will result in big differences.

My teenage children, Brandon and Kayla, have been looking forward to Spring Break, and I’m taking a week of leave to make sure our family spends some quality time together. I hope you and yours will be doing this, too. The older my children get, the more it reminds me of how fast

time goes and how quickly they grow and develop into individuals with unique passions and goals. I feel it is my responsibility to them, and to my wife, to make sure to maintain a balance between work and family, and so I can be an active part of their lives. I think about the employees of this District, who I feel are part of my other family, and

I often encourage them to maintain this balance. Doing so will contribute to our District philosophy of “Building Strong and Taking Care of People,” and, in this case, positively impact the people who matter most to us.

Did you know that April 1 used to be known as “New Year’s Day,” and anyone who didn’t realize it was called an April Fool? Someone in the District told me that, and I chuckled. I know that, all over the world, major religious events are celebrated in the spring, and nearly all cultures have some sort of ritual they engage in.

Whether you will be visiting cherry blossoms, painting and exchanging eggs, packing sweaters, or helping to clean up our parks, riverbanks, and open-space areas, I hope you have some fun and laugh

out loud. If you are taking some well deserved time off from work, I hope you come back refreshed, recharged, and ready to continue the great work we do in support of the nation. Happy spring, everyone!

Warm Regards,

COL Toy

Col. R. Mark Toy



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Victor Bartkus, a member of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District's Arizona/Nevada Area Office's Asset Management division, speaks with members of the public at the annual Tres Rios Nature and Earth Festival Mar. 9. Bartkus and other members of the LA District spoke with members of the public during the two-day festival about USACE projects including the Tres Rios Flow Regulating Wetlands project in Phoenix's West Valley. (Photo by Daniel J. Calderon)

LA District team members brave the elements for annual Tres Rios Nature Festival

By Daniel J. Calderón

PHOENIX -- Under a cloudy sky that had been dropping buckets of rain across the "Valley of the Sun" the night before, members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District's Arizona/Nevada Area Office joined with exhibitors and vendors at the annual Tres Rios Nature and Earth Festival held Mar. 9 and 10 at the Baseline and Meridian Wildlife Area near the Phoenix International Raceway.

"Yeah, I knew it might be raining this morning and it's not always fun being out in it; but, I like coming out to talk with people about what we do," said Vic Bartkus, who works in the Asset Management division. "The people who come to our booth are always interested in our work; but, they don't always know the variety of work that we do."

District team members talked with members of the public about projects across the Valley, the state and the LA District, which covers Southern California, all of Arizona, and portions of Ne-

vada and Utah. One of the major local projects the team discussed was the Tres Rios Environmental Restoration Project. The project involved the construction of a flow-regulating wetlands, which provide water for the river's ecosystem and a restored riparian habitat, and restoration work, which included removal of invasive tree species, along the banks of the Salt River.

The Corps of Engineers, City of Phoenix and contractors involved in the project have won many awards over the course of several years. Among the most recent awards the projects various phases have earned are the 2012 Valley Forward Crescordia Award in the Site Development and Landscape: Public Sector category and the Chief of Engineers Award of Excellence for Environmental Design.

Organizers bill the event as a chance for residents and visitors to "celebrate the rich heritage, ecology, history and wildlife of the Gila, Salt and Agua Fria Rivers." Over the course of two days, festival attendees can speak with a

variety of exhibitors and enjoy activities for adults and kids. Activities include canoeing, catch-and-release fishing and hiking up the nearby Monument Hill. In 1865, the hill was designated by the Astronomical Survey as Arizona's "Initial Point." This marked the location of the "zero point" on the grid for the mapping system in the area. It also established the reference point from where the rest of Arizona was surveyed.

Although the rain and had dampened the ground, leaving a bit of a gravelly mush for the exhibitors and the attractions, it didn't dampen the spirits of the District team members who participated at the event. Saturday stayed cold and overcast; but, Sunday's attendees enjoyed a mild day of Phoenix sun. Organizers said more than 6,000 people attended this year's event over the course of two days.

"Yes, it was a great time," Bartkus said. "I always enjoy the opportunity to meet with members of the public and I was glad to talk to everyone who came and visited with us."

District's proactive stance on safety helps prevent mishaps on Corps project sites

By Kristen Skopect

LOS ANGELES — Statistics smattered across the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's website make it clear that construction work is dangerous. In fact, it points out that in some years construction workers incur the most fatal injuries of any industry.

The employees in the Los Angeles District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are often involved in some aspect of construction, but Occupational Safety and Health Specialist Steve McCombs points out that there is a safety component in every function of every job, every day.

"Risks range from very minor to extremely high, depending on a person's job," McCombs said. "Regardless of the type of work performed for the Corps, the goal is to have that work performed safely."

To that end, the District employs six safety and occupational health specialists, and one wellness coordinator, to cover its widespread area of operations. These employees keep tabs on myriad projects, like military and civil works construction, dredging, and operation and maintenance activities, as well as more routine workplace safety aspects like promoting ergonomic work environments, wellness activities and managing the Army Safety Program requirements. The section's work is apportioned by Safety Chief Daryll Fust, who takes into account each person's sub-specialties and the geographic location they are designated to cover.

McCombs, who covers some of the harbors, the Santa Ana Mainstem and VA hospital projects in Southern California, was at a VA Greater Los Angeles jobsite on March 4 to observe a high-risk crane operation at one project and a high-risk work-at-heights job at another. He said the first project came to his attention because of the proximity of the crane to the hospital building and the involvement of hoisting a person in a lift. The other job had people building scaffolding more than 50 feet high. In both cases, the VA Project Office had requested Safety Office involvement.

"I was pleased to see the sites were well prepared and



Steve McCombs, an occupational safety and health specialist with the Corps of Engineers' Los Angeles District, observes construction at the renovation site of the Greater Los Angeles VA hospital with Adorable Javier, an engineering technician also working on the project. (Photo by Kristen Skopect)


cordoned off for public safety when I arrived and that the Accident Prevention Plan was being followed," he said. "It was also obvious the projects had been fully coordinated with the VA's safety office."

Prior to beginning any project with the Corps, a contractor is required to submit an APP and Quality Control Plan before they are issued the Notice to Proceed. An approved APP defines how safety will be incorporated into the project.

McCombs took pictures, observed the work practices and documented the work for reporting purposes, but commented that, with limited safety staff, the District mandates that all field construction personnel take OSHA's 30-hour construction safety course, which makes them safety aware and also promotes when they should call in a safety specialist for an extra layer of oversight. The Safety Office personnel are all OSHA-authorized construction safety trainers and provide this training on a regular basis.

Interestingly, during the course of observing the projects and just before lunch, a red-tailed hawk swooped near the crane operation looking for a meal among the pigeons roosting on the building. The sight reminded McCombs that

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Recognize
Retreat
Report

— WHEN YOU MAY HAVE ENCOUNTERED A MUNITION.

— DO NOT TOUCH, MOVE OR DISTURB IT, BUT CAREFULLY LEAVE THE AREA.

— CALL 911!



‘Never Again’ theme of 2013 Holocaust National Days of Remembrance

By Sonya Trammell-Jones

LOS ANGELES - The United States Holocaust Museum has designated April 8 as Holocaust Remembrance Day. The Department of Defense has noted the week of April 7-14 as the Days of Remembrance to take time to observe and learn of the tragic events in Europe prior to U.S. participation in World War II.

This year's National Theme "Never Again: Heeding the Warning Signs" is a human mantra that helps us to be mindful as people of diverse backgrounds and cultural differences that make America so great; we must NEVER allow the travesties of the past to become a repeated event.

To truly understand how to keep from repeating the actions of the past, let's take a view of the timeline of the Holocaust so that we can Heed the Warning Signs.

In January 1933 the Nazi Party, led by Adolf Hitler, rises to power. On January 30, 1933, in the effort of the Nazi success in parliamentary elections, President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Hitler Chancellor. Nazis established the first major concentration camp for political opponents. Soon after the Novemberpogrom (Kristallnacht), 10,000 Jewish men were incarcerated in this camp in "protective custody."

Nuremberg Laws, or Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor, like restrictive anti-Jewish legislation passed on 15 September, 1935, defining who was a Jew, denied citizenship to Jews and forbade intermarriage.

The laws were expanded to Nazi-occupied countries and territories and their implementation was a matter of life and death to individuals. Soon after Anschluss of Austria (in German to join and make a union) took place. Anti-Jewish laws were immediately implemented for the Austrian Jewish population.

September - October 1938 Munich Agreement and annexation spread to Sudetenland, part of Czechoslovakia, and the Novemberpogrom or Kristallnacht began a month later. Nazis ravaged the Jewish communities in Germany, Austria, the Sudetenland, and Danzig (Gdansk), as a revenge for the assassination of Ernst vom Rath, third secretary of the German embassy in Paris, by a young Jewish man named

Herschel Grynszpan.

Hundreds of synagogues and Jewish businesses were vandalized or destroyed.

March 15, 1939, the Nazi regime dismembers the rampant Czechoslovakian state. On 15 March, 1939, the German troops marched into Prague. Slovakia is established as a German-satellite state. The Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia is created out of two Czech provinces. The Jewish population subjugated to all anti-Jewish laws and eventual deportation to the East or to Theresienstadt Ghetto.

Then on August 24, 1939, Molotov-Ribbentrop Non-Aggression Pact between Nazi Germany and the USSR, named by the signatories, Soviet foreign minister Viacheslav Molotov and German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop. The secret protocol to this treaty provisioned the division of Poland between Germany and the USSR and the annexation of East European countries and territories in favor of the USSR. In return, the USSR withdrew from the anti-German negotiations with Great Britain and France.

After the German Army invaded Poland, the Soviet Army entered the Polish provinces from the East. Despite the Soviet betrayal, the Polish Army courageously fought for one month. Jewish population of Poland demonstrated valor defending the common homeland. Germany invades of Poland. The Second World War began.

On 3 September, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. Until

the German invasion of Western Europe in the spring of 1940, it was waged as a "phony" war, there was no warfare on the Western Front. The Polish Government went into exile in London. Polish resistance to German occupation began. Polish underground army, the Home Army (Armia Krajowa) unites the multiple resistance units in February 1942, it is 400,000 men strong and received order from the Polish Government in London. From 1933 - 1939, Nazis enacted 400 anti-Jewish laws

From 1939 - 1940, Nazi authorities divided Poland, annexing its western part to the Greater Germany and establishing on the rest of the Polish territory as the General Government, with the capital in Krakow. Anti-Jewish measures, including



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Channel dredging benefits coastal marsh in Newport Beach

By Greg Fuderer

NEWPORT BEACH, Calif. – During the past couple decades, material accumulating near the mouth of the Santa Ana River has impacted an adjacent marsh, limiting its tidal flow, reducing water quality and threatening nesting habitat for endangered and threatened species.

A Los Angeles District Army Corps of Engineers project underway will not only remedy those conditions, but also provide material to renourish a nearby section of coastline.

CJW Construction, Inc., of Santa Ana, began removing nearly 73,000 cubic yards of sediment in the southern channels of the 92-acre marsh in January. The work will restore the design depth of channels in the marsh, restoring tidal circulation and improving water quality.

The primary beneficiaries of the work will be endangered species, such as the light-footed clapper rail and the

Belding's savannah sparrow, for which the marsh provides nesting habitat. Restoration of marsh channels to design depths will remove sandy shoals and prevent the transition of intertidal marsh habitats, while also supporting the overall health of the coastal salt marsh ecosystem through improved circulation. In addition, the project will remove weedy vegetation from an adjacent island to restore nesting habitat for the federally endangered California least tern.

Material removed from marsh channels will end up in two places. About 23,000 cubic yards of material is compatible with local beach sand and will be deposited in about 800 feet of water about a half mile south of the river mouth to provide beach nourishment for local beaches eroded by littoral processes. The remaining 50,000 cubic yards of material that is not compatible for nearshore disposal will be placed at an approved upland disposal site.

CJW anticipates completing the



The primary beneficiaries of the work will be endangered species, such as the Belding's savannah sparrow, for which the marsh provides nesting habitat. (Photo by USACE)

dredging and removing its equipment by late March or early April and will restore the site to pre-project conditions.



This graphic shows the channels within the Santa Ana River marsh where contractor CJW will remove nearly 73,000 cubic yards of material to restore channel depth, tidal flow and improve water quality. (USACE illustration)

Exercise crucial to extended life expectancy

By Cecy Ordenez

LOS ANGELES — Many of my past articles have focused on fad diets, weight loss and the benefits of losing weight while absentmindedly avoiding those of you in a healthy or “normal” weight range. I often encounter people who may be overweight who believe that someone who is within a normal weight range, is in fact, healthy. I find myself explaining all too often that this is not entirely true. Let me explain.

Being within a normal weight range is not synonymous with being healthy. There are many people who are within a normal weight range but still smoke, have high stress levels, eat an unhealthy diet, and are sedentary. Consequently, these types of people can still have high cholesterol, diabetes and/or hypertension. These behaviors can still lead to disabling life changes that decrease both quality of life and life expectancy.

Modifying risk factors is the key, specifically, eliminating being sedentary. New research shows that even for the severely obese, (those with a body mass index above 35) exercising for about 2.5 hours a week at moderate intensity or for 75 minutes at vigorous levels puts average life expectancy a notch above that of a healthy weight person who is sedentary.

Let's face it, we all know that exercise is good for you and will help you live longer. However, the study clearly sounds a loud wake-up call to “normal weight” couch potatoes who



Richard Fontanilla, the Area Engineer for the District's Phoenix office, marked his fortieth birthday with a grueling bike ride on the Windgate Pass Trail, near Scottsdale. The activity resulted in Fontanilla burning almost 2,000 calories. (Photo courtesy of Richard Fontanilla)

believe their good BMIs will ensure them a long life. It's time that both healthy and overweight/obese people stop using their weight as a measure of health and instead set a priority to get moving.

“We have to get people to understand that it's not all about weight,” said Dr. Robert Sallis, a sports medicine specialist with Kaiser Permanente in Fontana who has spearheaded the Exercise Is Medicine initiative under the sponsorship of the American College of Sports Medicine. “Not everyone can lose weight. But everyone can get fit.”

One of many great examples of fitness we have at the Corps is Richard Fontanilla, Area Engineer in the Phoenix office. On March 1, Richard turned 40. “Instead of being bummed about getting old, I decided to take on a physical challenge for my fortieth.” Richard tackled Windgate Pass Trail located in Scottsdale, Ariz. “It's one of the steeper, technically challenging trails to mountain bike in the Phoenix area. The uphill climb is around 1,400 feet of elevation gain in under four miles.” Richard burned close to 2,000 calories with an average heart rate of 160 beats per minute.

It takes time and commitment to want to be healthy no matter what your age, weight, or level of health. I think it's time we all stop making excuses and start making exercise a habit. A happier and healthier you starts by taking that first step.

So let's go out there and get stepping!



A body mass index under 35 does not necessarily mean that a person is healthy. One must also maintain healthy eating and exercise habits. (File photo)



Sallie McGuire, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District Arizona Regulatory Branch chief, speaks with a group of employees at the District's Arizona/Nevada Area Office Mar. 27 about the District's mentoring program. Among the goals of the program are allowing employees the opportunity to develop deeper professional relationships and enhancing both the mentor's and associate's leadership and interpersonal skills. (Photo by Daniel J. Calderon)

Area Office hosts Mentoring Program meeting

By Daniel J. Calderón

PHOENIX – Sallie McGuire, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District Arizona Regulatory Branch chief, hosted a meeting at the District's Arizona/Nevada Area Office Mar. 27 to discuss the District's mentoring program.

“In some areas, it's referred to as a mentor-mentee relationship,” McGuire said. “In our District, we have a mentor-associate relationship. We try to focus on it being a meeting of equals. The program focuses a lot of professional development”

Among the many other goals of the program are allowing employees the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of what is needed to succeed

and advance in the Corps and enhancing both the mentor's and associate's leadership and interpersonal skills.

“I have three people I'm mentoring at different levels,” said John Keever, the District's Construction Division chief. “This program is an excellent part of our organization's focus.”

McGuire said there are also opportunities for employees at senior levels to engage junior employees in “reverse mentoring.” In this relationship, the junior employee can teach the senior one skills he or she hasn't mastered or would like a refresher on – like social networking or another online medium that might have come along during the course of the senior employee's career.

Keever said the mentoring program is meant to be flexible. Employees are

not “mentored for life” and associates can seek multiple mentors since he said no one has all the answers. Keever feels the program is valuable for junior employees because it will help them become the leaders the Corps will need in the future.

“Thos of us closer to retirement age would really like to know that those you who are not there yet are ready to take over,” he said. “It gives us, who have put in a lifetime of effort, comfort to know this organization will be well cared for when we leave it.”

Employees interested in finding a mentor can either look on the District's SharePoint site for additional information or ask another employee who is senior to them if they would like to be a mentor.

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Spring has sprung!

By Steve McCombs

LOS ANGELES — Ah. Spring has finally arrived. Love is in the air. So is lots of pollen that make my wife (and hence, me, miserable). The birds are chirping. Creatures great and small are busily coming out of their winter hideouts. Spring brings the promise of new growth, better weather, and a fresh outlook on life, the universe, and everything. If you're a fan of Douglas Adams books, you'll get that last line (rest in peace, Doug, and thanks for all the laughs). Now you should also note that among all the flora and fauna enjoying the new season, there exists a small percentage of them that can do you, your co-workers, and loved ones some considerable harm.

Not that you need a geography lesson, but our footprint extends throughout the southwestern United States. It is home to some rather nasty beasts who, for the most part, just want to be left alone. However, when molested – either by accident or on purpose – these critters will strike, sting, bite, claw and/or deliver you a miserable time. Some are occasionally fatal. Ergo, I thought you might like to learn about some of these beasts and hopefully have a better eye on target, as it were. So without further adieu, here are some of the main things to avoid.

Rattlesnakes are very common and, as the human

population encroaches more and more into their turf, bites have become more commonplace. While fatalities are not that common, bites are, and many times the snake will not rattle before it strikes. Once bitten, you're in for a very uncomfortable stay in the hospital. There are several varieties, the most toxic being the Mojave Green. The following link is from our fellow public servants at the U.S. Geological Survey. Give it a [peek](#).

This next link is about scorpions, but for those of you in Arizona, pay particular attention to the Bark Scorpion; it is the most venomous scorpion in the United States. Here's a great [page](#) from the National Park Service.

There are also several varieties of swarming/stinging insects. Most of us think about Africanized Bees – the so-called “killer bees” and the various science fiction and disaster movies that sprang up from their arrival here in the United States. Only a trained specialist can tell the difference between an Africanized bee and their calmer cousin, the European Honey Bee. However, there is another flying bug – the Yellow Jacket – that has the same nasty temperament. My sister-in-law was working in her garden when she disturbed a nest in the ground by pulling weeds. 100 plus stings later and a high-speed trip to the hospital ensued, and she was lucky to survive. Best advice – anytime you see swarming bees, hornets, etc., turn around and rapidly go in the opposite

INTERACTIVE!
Click image to
play!



Video of a Mojave Green Rattlesnake shows the snake's green coloration and distinct rattling that can often--but not always--be heard before the snake strikes. (Video and video still by Robert Williams. Used with permission)

direction. And there are also some other fairly nasty species you should avoid as well. Link to the below for some further [reading](#).

In the non-animal or insect categories you should really avoid Poison Oak. Along with its cousins, Poison Ivy and Poison Sumac, these plants contain urushiol oil. 75 – 80 percent of the population is allergic to this substance. Some are so allergic that hospitalization is required. Poison Sumac does not grow west of Texas, but our footprint has both Poison Oak and Ivy. You should read up on these plants so you know how to avoid them, and what to do if you come into contact with them. Here's an excellent [link](#).

Now, you may be asking yourself “how likely is it that I might become a victim to one of these natural hazards?” Truth be told, it depends on how much time you spend out of doors. And it also depends on what you're wearing at the time.

Lastly, knowledge is power! Before you venture out, think of what you might encounter and do a little “risk management” as part of your preparation.

There are many wonderful and exciting places to visit in our footprint. So enjoy yourselves and, as always: Drive safe, drive sober and buckle up!

Steve



Africanized Honeybees, or “killer bees” as they have come to be known, are among the many risks inherent with the coming of Spring. (Video and video still courtesy of National Geographic)

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safety hazards at a jobsite can involve many things, to include plants, animals and insects.

“There are many types of venomous reptiles, stinging insects and poisonous plants in our District footprint,” he said. “For that reason, we provide chaps for maintenance workers who may encounter snakes, as well as other types of protective gear.”

Fust's section has the added responsibility of carrying out accident investigations, if a person is injured in the course of work. However, it is the Safety Office's goal, McCombs said, to be value added and to help keep projects safe, continuously moving, and have a “Mission Complete” without mishaps.

“We have a very proactive safety program in the District,” McCombs said. “When programs are reactive instead of proactive is when accidents tend to happen. There were more than 8.5 million hours of construction activities monitored by the District in the past five years and only 15 incidents involving lost time.”



Occupational safety and health specialists like Steve McCombs ensure that scaffolding at project sites is safe and that contractor personnel are adhering to accident prevention plans. (Photo by Kristen Skopeck)

What is FEGLI?

By Liza A. Rosa
Human Resources Specialist

LOS ANGELES — The Federal Government established the Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) Program on August 29, 1954. It is the largest group life insurance program in the world, covering more than four million federal employees and retirees, as well as many of their family members.

FEGLI provides group term life insurance. As such, it does not build up any cash value or paid-up value. It consists of basic life insurance coverage and three options. In most cases, if you are a new federal employee, you are automatically covered by basic life insurance and your payroll office

deducts premiums from your paycheck unless you waive the coverage.

In addition to basic, there are three forms of optional insurance that you can elect. You must have basic insurance in order to elect any of the options. Unlike basic, enrollment in optional insurance is not automatic -- you must take action to elect the options.

The cost of basic insurance is shared between you and the government. You pay two-thirds of the total cost and the government pays one-third. Your age does not affect the cost of basic insurance.

You pay the full cost of Optional insurance, and the cost depends on your age. The Office of Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance (OFEGLI), which



is a private entity that has a contract with the federal government, processes and pays claims under the FEGLI Program.

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ghettorization, are being implemented.

There were five major Jewish ghettos in Poland, namely Warsaw, Łódź, Kraków, Lwów, and Lublin. The Jews are confined to the ghettos and destined to starvation diseases, and eventual deportations to death and labor camps.

April - May 1940 German armies invaded Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, and France. Anti-Jewish measures and actions vary from country to country. Eventually, from 1942 on, the deportations of Jews from Western Europe to the death camps in Poland began.

June 22, 1941 Invasion of the Soviet Union, or Operation Barbarossa, begins. The Soviet Army depleted by the Stalin's purges and taken by surprise, rapidly retreat suffering great casualties, millions of Soviet soldiers are taken as prisoners of war by the German Army.

Einsatzgruppen, special action units composed of German police and security forces, follow the avant-garde of the army. They carry out mass killing of the Jewish population on the occupied Soviet territories (Ukraine, Belorussia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Bessarabia, and western part of the Russian Federation). Instead of ghettorization, the German killing squads and the army perpetrated mass killing of Jewish population in the wake of invasion.

29 - 30 September 1941 Babi Yar Massacre. On these dates, at the outskirts of Kiev, the German police battalions (part of the Einsatzgruppe C) and Ukrainian auxiliary police killed 33,800 Jewish men, women, and children. It was an extraordinary massacre even on a Nazi scale. The action at Babi Yar came as the Nazi retaliation

to the Soviet NKVD (security police) subversive activities in the first days of German presence in Kiev. The decision was taken by the high SS and police commanders in Ukraine. The Germans claimed that the Jews were part of this conspiracy.

Then to make the subversive actions from 1933 to January 20, 1942, the Wannsee Conference, a meeting of the highest SS, Security, and Economic authorities of Nazi Germany to discuss "The Final Solution to the Jewish Question" in Europe, a euphemistic term for the total extermination of the European Jewry. A plan was developed to establish and convert several concentration camps into the institutions of mass murder and slave labor spurring the systematic, industrialized annihilation of the Jewish population in the German occupied and controlled territories.

So that we never forget and heed the warning signs, the EEO Office will present a dynamic live webinar presentation on Tuesday, April 9, 2013 at 11:15, from the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust, the oldest Holocaust museum in the US.

This event captures the lives and experiences of Holocaust Survivors including people from Los Angeles as well as other parts of the US, Israel and Europe. Each person will illustrate the glorious conquest of the heart-wrenching past and how those experiences helped shape the Survivors' lives. We look forward to you stopping in, bringing your lunch and hearing a true living history project! Bring your questions, there will be an interactive question and answer period after the speaker's presentations.



Dr. Veronica Eliasson, assistant professor for the Department of Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering at University of Southern California's Viterbi School of Engineering, speaks to handful of District employees during a Women's History Month event at the District Headquarters March 18. (Photo by David Salazar)

USC professor speaks at District's Women's History Month event

By David Salazar

LOS ANGELES – (March 18, 2013) Dozens of District employees attended a Women's History Month presentation in the district conference room March 8, and were captivated by the speaker, her journey, and her message.

Dr. Veronica Eliasson, assistant professor for the Department of Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering at University of Southern California's Viterbi School of Engineering, educated the small audience of district employees through a presentation, which mixed equal parts of history, humor, insight, and inspiration.

The theme of this year's national Women's History Month was "Women Inspiring Innovation Through Imagination: Celebrating Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and

Mathematics." Eliasson, a mechanical engineer who specializes in the study of shockwaves, was the perfect speaker for the event, owing to the Corps' interest to help increase the number of school age children—especially young women—who pursue careers in STEM.

"We have not only a need for leaders in STEM—because we're going to be short—but women in STEM," said Col. Mark Toy, commander of the Los Angeles District. "We've brought a lot of great women into the district in the time I've been here. In order for us to continue the mission that we do, we have to bring in great women in STEM to carry on the great traditions we have here in the Los Angeles District."

Eliasson's presentation first focused on female historical figures and their advancements in STEM. Many of the women Eliasson talked about

made groundbreaking discoveries that changed society forever. For Eliasson, beginning her presentation by introducing these pioneers made good sense.

"From a personal viewpoint it serves as tremendous inspiration to be reminded of the many accomplishments of women throughout time," Eliasson explained.

As women fought to contribute to society in the male-dominated STEM fields, they had to overcome tremendous obstacles. Eliasson believes acknowledging and understanding these challenges can be very encouraging.

"They often worked in less than ideal environments, and sometimes were not even allowed to present their own results just because of their gender and still they continued their research with

— see PROFESSOR, Page 15 —

USACE Electrical Engineer embodies National Women’s History Month theme

By Karla Marshall

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- Women electrical engineers are few in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Shafak Pervez should know--she is one of them. She is also the kind of woman who thrives on new experiences that engage her mind and help other people simultaneously.

For Pervez, 34, learning new things and staying busy is a priority and that’s the reason she joined the USACE team. “I get bored working on same type of projects and was looking for something that would provide variety and freedom to move around. I love the type of work USACE does - we are everywhere!”

Born in Pakistan, Pervez immigrated with her family to California when she was 12. “I went to middle school and high school in West Sacramento,” she said. “And then on to Sacramento State University where I earned my electrical engineering degree.

Learning English was her first obstacle. Fortunately, that education started in Pakistan. “I had to take English beginning in the 6th grade,” she said and by the time she moved to the United States at the beginning of her 8th grade year, she had the basics down. “I knew the alphabet and some simple phrases. My mom helped a lot because she earned a master’s degree in Pakistan and needed to know English for her degree.”

Her mother also encouraged each of the family’s five children to pursue medical doctor degrees, but none did. “Somehow each of us chose a different path. I was good at science and math,” explained Pervez who took an electronics course during her freshman year of high school. “Taking the class was not my idea, but I enjoyed it and stayed with it.”

Pervez’ electronics teacher became a trusted mentor as did her high school guidance counselor. “They are the reason I became an engineer,” said Pervez, who deployed to Kandahar Airfield from the USACE Los Angeles District.

“I am very blessed and have always been surrounded by people who have my best interest at heart. They were compassionate but never hesitated to tell me what I needed to hear even if I didn’t want to listen.”

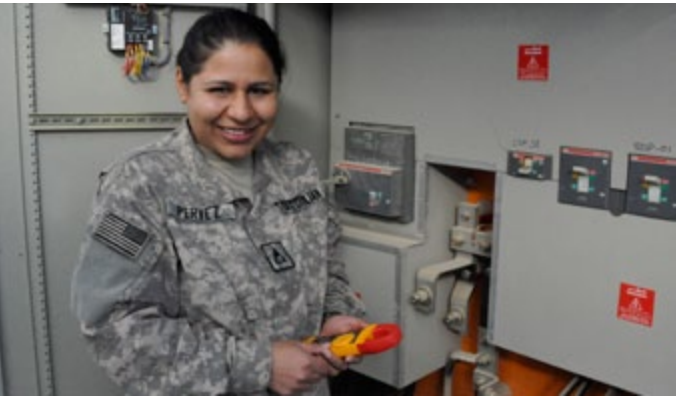
It is her mentors -- some engineers, others not--who have been a constant in her adult life. “I cannot remember a time when I didn’t have a mentor to turn to,”

Pervez explained. “They are people I trust and can speak freely to regarding my personal and professional goals.” Pervez has achieved significant professional goals, but is not yet finished. During the last year, she passed her Professional Engineer exam and became a LEED Accredited Professional. “I am now pursuing an on-line master’s degree in business administration when I’m not working,” she said.

At the Afghanistan Engineer District-South, Pervez reviews project designs and provides technical services to the district’s field offices throughout south and west Afghanistan. She arrived in Afghanistan in June 2012, but this is not her first deployment.

“I deployed the first time in 2010 for one year and was the lead electrical engineer with the quality assurance branch,” said Pervez. Although she did not deploy to fill that role, her work ethic, experience and skill led to a recommendation for the job and ultimately an offer. “How could I have said, ‘no,’ she exclaimed. “I got to teach Afghans electric fundamentals and safety and performed construction site inspections and learned at the same time.”

To Pervez, it is the challenge and accomplishment that drive her to success. Her current challenge is learning about high voltage electric systems so that she



Shafak Pervez, a U.S. Army civilian electrical engineer deployed to Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, embodies the 2013 National Women’s History Month theme: “Women Inspiring Innovation Through Imagination: Celebrating Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.” (Photo by Karla Marshall)

can be the best at her job.

“To my peers, I’m the subject matter expert, but there is so much that I do not know because high voltage is a specialized field and I have little experience in it.” Pervez acknowledges that it is difficult to admit she doesn’t know some things and will have to get back to her coworkers with answers. But, she says, “When faced with something I don’t know - first step is to acknowledge that I don’t know it and second is to go learn it.”

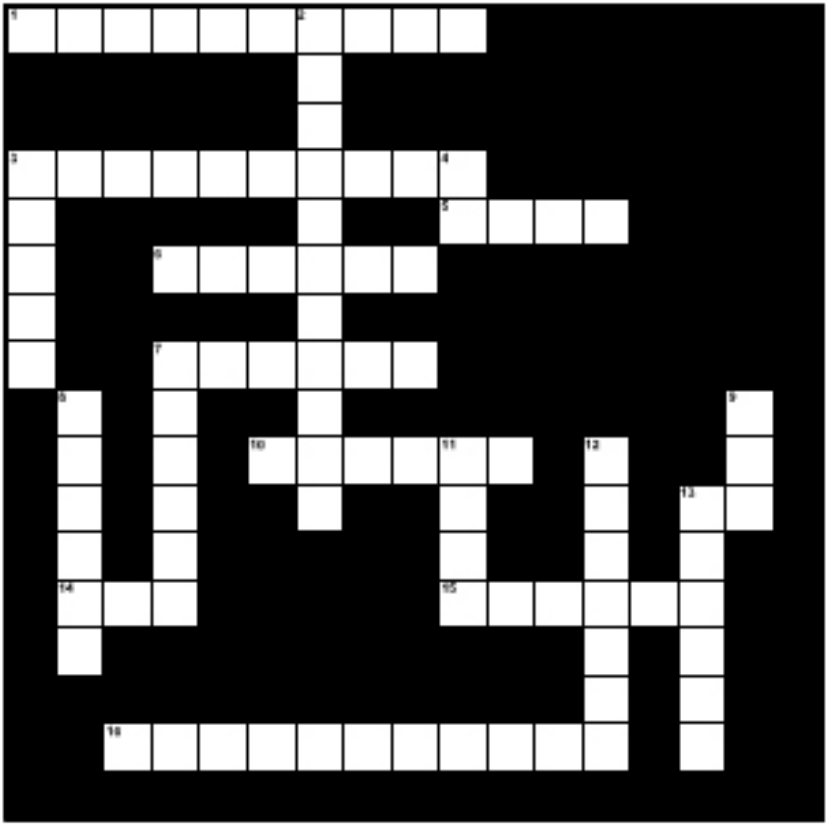
That attitude is why Pervez embodies the 2013 National Women’s History Month theme: “Women Inspiring Innovation Through Imagination: Celebrating Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.”

“I like to focus on smaller groups, people who are around me,” she shared. “Sometimes it means listening to a person, acknowledging her thoughts and ideas and just letting her know that someone cares. Small things make a huge difference. I give of myself freely and often. I always make myself available to friends and anyone who may need my help.”

It can be difficult for women in engineering career fields, but Pervez said that to be successful, persistence is the key. “Don’t ever give up! Follow your heart. Ask a lot of questions and if you still don’t understand, ask again.”

NewsCastle Crossword

Test your knowledge of this month’s issue by completing the crossword puzzle below. Print the page and fill it out the old fashioned way, or click the link below to complete it online!



- ACROSS**
- 1. Dr Eliasson specialty
 - 3. No slouch at 40
 - 5. Engineer society acronym
 - 6. Green rattler
 - 7. Col Toy favorite season
 - 10. SPL EE in Afghanistan
 - 13. Marriage vow I
 - 14. Poison leaf not oak
 - 15. Tres Rios festival
 - 16. April 8 national day
- DOWN**
- 2. Killer honey bees
 - 3. Life insurance acronym
 - 4. After such or cold
 - 7. priority on all sites
 - 8. Soil studied in San Diego
 - 9. Equality office acronym
 - 11. Opposite of odd
 - 12. AZ regulatory chief
 - 13. To deepen as in Newport



— PROFESSOR from Page 13 —

amazing results,” she said, citing Marie Curie and the time her husband, Pierre Curie, had to present on her behalf at the Royal Institution in London in 1903. “These women were driven by their passion for STEM, and I can’t think of a better motivation. They didn’t give up. To me, that’s worth a lot.”

Eliasson earned her Master’s degree in mechanical engineering from Kungliga Tekniska Hogskolan--known in English as the Royal Institute of Technology--in Stockholm, Sweden, in 2002. She later earned her doctorate in mechanics, also from KTH.

Eliasson earned the Young Scientist Award for best oral presentation during the 2006 European Fluid Mechanics Conference in Sweden.

Eliasson believes that if she could touch just one person and compel them to help encourage young women to pursue careers in STEM, she’s done her part.

“If I can inspire at least one person in the audience to mentor or help a young woman to pursue a career within STEM, then we will continue to make progress,” Eliasson said. “I see

it as ‘pay it forward’ and since I really enjoy my work--I truly believe I have the best job in the world--I would like to see more young women experience the same. I also see the talk I gave today as a great chance to reach out to the Army Corps of Engineers and establish new points of contact. There might be opportunities for collaborations, both in terms of engineering applications and outreach programs.”

It seems Eliasson’s mission was accomplished. “I was so amazed by her, and I was invigorated,” said Deb Leighton, the district’s workforce manager. Leighton was among the several attendees at Eliasson’s speech.

Leighton is working with Eliasson to organize a trip for Corps employees to Eliasson’s lab at USC to see Eliasson’s research and work up close. This is exactly the type of reaction Eliasson was hoping for.

“It would be great if we somehow can boost the confidence of young women to believe in themselves and to get them to pursue their dreams,” Eliasson said. “Encouragement from peers is important. Maybe sometimes a pat on the back and a positive statement like ‘you are doing fine, you can do this’ would help a long way.”

Embracing sickness is not weakness

By Daniel J. Calderón

PHOENIX -- Illness is a funny thing. Not funny in the sense that I can see laughing my head off whenever I get a cold, the flu or pneumonia again. But, funny in a “Man that’s odd” kind of way.

It’s funny in how we, as grownups, seem to react to it. I remember when I was a kid and I got sick, I couldn’t stand it because getting sick meant I couldn’t go out and play with my friends or cousins. I had to stay in my room and recover. The only plus was that I got the chance to read all the books or comics I could want. I’d have a pile around me and I’d spend the day or two alternating between reading and sleeping. But, I

“Is work really that important that people should feel compelled to come in even if they are sick? I’m starting to think not -- but, I have to try and convince myself along with some of you.”

Today, as an adult, it’s different. When I get sick, instead of staying home, I force myself out of bed, grab a handful of whatever medicine I think is going to help heal me and shove myself in the car to go to work. I suffer through the day with sniffles, sneezing, coughing, chest pains, body aches and a generally poor attitude toward being there; but, I refuse to leave because “I have things to do.”

And, I don’t think I am the only one who does this. I think the majority of people come to work unless they’re either bleeding from their eyes, ears or some other place from which blood does not normally issue or they are so ill, they are incapacitated and unable to rise from their beds. Why? Is work really that important that people should feel compelled to come in even if they are sick? I’m starting to think not – but, I have to try and convince myself along with some of you. Here goes...

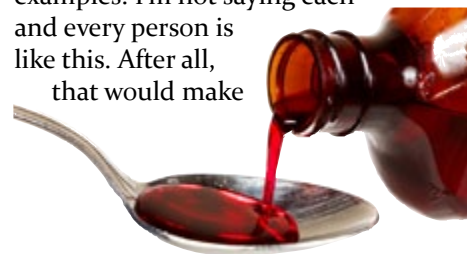
When you have chills or fever or any number of symptoms, it’s your body saying, “Hey there. It’s me. There’s something not quite right here. I’m doing what I can to fix it; but, you really

have to cut down on your energy usage so I can focus on getting rid of the invader.” Because, after all, that’s what sicknesses are – some foreign invader coming into our bodies and trying to remake them in their own image or just feeding until there is nothing left. We have a marvelous defense system designed into us; but, we have to allow it time and resources to do its job. It functions less efficiently if we’re trying to go about our regular business since the body will try to accommodate that as well.

We are (in the Federal government business) given a certain amount of sick time that we can use – oddly enough—when we are sick. Yet, I think

the majority of people try to hoard it until that magical time when we can retire thinking we can sell it back for some extra money. Well and good; but, in the meantime, we’re sniffing, sneezing, coughing and generally making things rough during our working lives. It’s rough for us – the sick ones – and for our co-workers who have to deal with us being sick around them and wondering if we’re going to pass along our particular bug to them. I understand sharing is caring; but, like anything else, too much sharing can be a bad thing.

It may be that it’s part of a culture that really can’t figure out a middle ground on too many things. We, as Americans, don’t seem to understand the concept of moderation too well. Or, if we understand it, we choose to ignore it in favor of extremes. What does that mean? Think about it for a bit and I’m sure you can come up with myriad examples. I’m not saying each and every person is like this. After all, that would make



my point for me. But, I am saying that as a culture, Americans tend to veer wildly to one side or another. The middle lane isn’t as easily populated.

Going back to the sick thing, though, it seems like people just don’t know how to let go of work and embrace the illness. Being sick is no picnic, I know. But, I think more people should just go ahead and take a day or two at the onset or when it feels the worst and just revel in the time off. As an adult, you can go ahead and stay home. You can take your medicine and watch whatever movies or TV shows you want. You can yell at the contestants on “The Price is Right” like you used to when you were kids. You can surf channels and lament at the loss of really good cartoons and the plethora of “learning” shows that are somehow cleverly tied in with commercials on the network for products based on those cartoons. You can have your fill of chicken noodle soup or whatever your cure du jour may be while you have your feet kicked up. You can sleep the day away and remember what a pleasure it was to take a nap.

On a side note, I encourage all work places to institute nap policies for employees; but, I tend to doubt the union will take that one up. Oh well.

The sick hours are yours. You’ve earned them and you should not feel bad about using them if you are genuinely ill. The work we do is important – no doubt – but people can survive without you (and without me) for a day or two while you recover from whatever bug you may have caught. Coming into work sick is not so much a display of dedication as a show of how obstinate you can be in the face of your own body fighting an internal battle. Listen to your body. It has a vested interest in keeping you alive and well.

Just a thought...



Around the District

outreach

The LA District Recruitment Team attended the Chi Epsilon Engineering Job Fair at Cal Poly Pomona on Feb 28. The team spoke over 60 students regarding the Pathways Program, which could lead to employment with the District, either as a Student or a Recent Graduate. The Team consisted of Enoch Burrola (dark blue), Matthew Gonzalez (dark blue), Tyler Overmire (red), Victor Andreas (light blue), and Charles Dwyer (white). All of the Team except Dwyer attended Cal Poly Pomona.



professional pride

COL Mark Toy presents a hard hat, District t-shirt and coin to Dr. Veronica Eliasson, assistant professor for the Department of Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering at University of Southern California’s Viterbi School of Engineering, after her inspirational presentation as part of the District’s Women’s History Month event March 18.



BUILDING STRONG® and Taking Care of People!

Employees recognized as District award winners

LOS ANGELES — Congratulations to the following individuals. They are the Los Angeles District winners of these Corps-level competitions.

Hard Hat of the Year
Joseph Flynn

Construction Management Excellence:
Troy Olson





HOLOCAUST

National Days of Remembrance



NEVER AGAIN

heeding the warning signs