



By Michael A. Pinto, CSP, CMP

## Re-Visioning: Environmental Services for Cleaning and Restoration Contractors

**S**ometimes we just have to dream and think of a better tomorrow so that one day it may come true.

My current dream regarding environmental services for cleaning and restoration contractors comes from some very awake conversations rather than from peaceful slumber. While leading a recent mold refresher course we did a brief introduction of students where I asked them to share not only their name and company, but also the types of services they provide and a summary of their relevant training. As more information came forth, I was struck by both the diversity of environment related services as well as the incredible range of educational programs the students experienced.

The body of knowledge represented by the people in that class crystallized two concepts that I had been mulling over for quite a while:

1. The environmental work that we do on a whole range of projects in the cleaning and restoration field can be summarized as identifying and removing microscopic contaminants.
2. There is a core set of skills necessary to deal with any type of small particulate, and some specialized knowledge that is required for each specific material.

### Size Does Matter!

The cleaning portion of restoration is easily divided into two subcategories:

cleaning the visible dirt and removing the invisible. For example, in the construction industry it is fairly common to have contracts stating that a work site must be left “broom clean.” This is often interpreted as meaning that the construction area is to be left free of visible debris, while sometimes a light coating of dust is still considered acceptable. However, for most environmental work broom clean or dust free is just a start, not an ending point. After the remediation efforts are completed, a detailed visual inspection is followed by some form of quality assurance testing. This process makes sense as environmental remediation usually involves microscopic contaminants in the form of one or more of the following:

- Asbestos fibers
- Lead particles
- Illicit drug residue
- Mold
- Soot/fire residue
- Infectious agents such as viruses and bacteria
- Trauma scene residue (which may also include gory visible contamination)
- Tear gas residue
- Fugitive dust from nanoparticle manufacturing
- Bird droppings or other animal residues
- Dust mites and their feces
- General indoor air particulates such as skin cells, printer and copy machine

toner residue, fiberglass shed from HVAC liners, and the like.

Although each of these materials has different properties that cause various health concerns, what ties them all together is that after cleaning the gross debris there is still a residue left that cannot be seen with an unaided eye. This commonality between seemingly disparate environmental concerns is the key to re-visioning our approach to preparing individuals for environmental work.



### Building on a Base of Common Skills

When the varied properties of different contaminants are put aside in favor of the more generic description of microscopic contaminants, then a new approach to education immediately becomes obvious. Basic skill sets are necessary for dealing with any such hazard. Regardless of the particular contaminant, a cleaning and restoration crew addressing microscopic particles must understand and apply skills related to:

- Isolation
- Dust control using negative pressure and air scrubbing
- Surface and personnel decontamination
- Personal protective equipment

- Dust free demolition, and
- Detailed cleaning.

These skills should form the core of any effective training for remediation of environmental hazards — and indeed they do. OSHA-mandated training for asbestos, EPA-required contractor training for lead paint, industry-approved classes for mold remediation, and healthcare-mandated training for infection control all integrate fundamental concepts as a substantial portion of the instruction.

### **A More Efficient Approach**

The overlapping information in current training programs not only wastes time and money, but can cast such a pall over the courses for experienced individuals that they may miss the key elements which define a particular educational program. Rather than mind-numbing repetition training, agencies, industry associations, and even government regulators should design courses for restoration contractors that take advantage of a core skill set and focus on the particulars that are vital to successfully remediating a specific hazard.

### **One Small Example to Light the Way**

While many training programs are currently locked into standardized formats by federal or state regulations or entrenched business interests, there are a few areas where new thinking can be applied. As the scourge of meth cooking advances across the country from the West Coast, individual states and communities are left to struggle with the proper approach to identifying qualified contractors who can address homes and other structures that have been contaminated by the residue and byproducts of methamphetamine compounds. Although a minority of states have detailed regulations regarding contractor

training (usually 3-5 days of training, oftentimes involving many HAZ-WOPER concepts that have little or nothing to do with the task at hand), in many areas those wishing to perform such remediation are only given vague instructions that they must have “appropriate” training.

There are organizations and individuals which work to identify a company’s existing level of skills and then offer appropriately detailed classes. For groups that have previous training in the core skills, a company can often provide an intensive one-day Meth Lab Clean-up training program. However, if the contractor is coming from a segment of the industry where isolating work areas, using HEPA-filtered equipment, and

wearing personal protective equipment is not standard practice, a more in-depth class that develops those skills with a focus on applying them to illicit drug labs may be more prudent.

So the dream is alive! Perhaps bit by bit, others will come to understand that mandated training of redundant concepts not only saps money and enthusiasm from the best and the brightest in the business, but it fails to prepare people to adapt core skills so they can successfully deal with the hazards of the future. ■

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