

Focus on Safety

Administrator's message emphasizes safety as NASA's primary core value

In a letter sent last month to officials in charge of NASA Headquarters Offices, directors of NASA centers and the director of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin called on members of senior management to commit themselves and their organizations to "heightened awareness and constant vigilance concerning health and safety."

"We will not compromise the safety and health of our people and property, nor harm the environment," writes Goldin. "NASA's Agency Safety Initiative is aimed at strengthening NASA's capabilities so that safety permeates every aspect of NASA work, and we routinely incorporate safety and health principles and practices into our daily decision-making processes and lives. I strongly believe that promoting and maintaining safety for the public, our astronauts, our employees, and our high-value assets is a prerequisite for NASA's success as an Agency."

Goldin asked senior officials to review the NASA safety policy with all personnel and commit themselves and their organizations to health and safety, requesting that each submit a written report signifying that this assignment has been met.

According to JSC Deputy Director Bill Parsons, the rigorous process involved in obtaining Voluntary Protection Program certification through the Occupational Safety and Health Administration improved the center's safety program. "We had a great safety program in place, a highly respected program within JSC, but we weren't getting where we wanted to be. We viewed VPP as a way to benchmark our safety program and identify changes we could make. In the process of obtaining VPP certification we found out how good it is and, more importantly, we found ways to improve it."

In May 1999, following a two-week on-site audit, OSHA representatives recommended the center for VPP Star work site status.

According to Parsons, the International Organization for Standardization or ISO standards have helped the effort to gain VPP status by placing increased awareness on the importance of continuous improvement in all processes. "Using quality management systems, we should constantly evaluate all that we do across the center to improve all elements including our safety program."

In closing, Goldin noted that "communication is essential to safety" and that there will be "zero tolerance" for retaliation at NASA for raising safety concerns. "NASA has established a procedure that encourages any employee (or contractor) to raise any issue of safety concern to his or her supervisor at any time. If that concern is not addressed at this level, the employee should raise it to higher levels of management to ensure that safety risks are taken seriously and addressed." All employees, Goldin notes, have a responsibility to report any unsafe conditions "even if there are perceived consequences."

Under VPP, OSHA requires JSC to have a system for employees to report hazards and encourages employees to report "near miss" incidents or "close calls." Employees have been doing both for years through the JSC Close Call System.

A close call is an event where someone almost gets hurt. It provides an opportunity to fix a problem before someone does get hurt. Close calls, like injuries, result from hazards (conditions that have the potential to hurt someone) and unsafe behaviors. If the problems that cause close calls can be fixed, injuries can be prevented. If a hazard can be fixed before a close call happens, even better.

To report a close call or hazard, use JSC Form 1257, which is available online or on posters in JSC buildings. You are encouraged to fix the problem yourself and report your action on the close call form. ■

White Sands Test Facility's Engineering Department wins New Mexico Roadrunner Quality Award

By **Cheerie R. Patneade**

Alan Spencer, Honeywell Technology Solutions Inc. Engineering Department manager, announced that his department has been selected as a winner in the annual New Mexico Quality awards in the Roadrunner category.

Committee members were: Candy Brown, Joe Capollo, Art Corella, Tim Dobson, Cecilia Fischer, Holger Fischer, Karen Giese, Hoyt Inman, Ken Lambert, Frank Mathis, Ed Moritz, Donna Nelson, Moira Romansky, Ken Schaaf, Alan Spencer, Ruby Steele and William Weed. Special members were HTSI Program Manager Bob Baker, Mike Hallock, David Hirsch and Barry Plante.

The three categories for the Quality New Mexico awards are: the Piñon, where "a serious commitment to use total quality concepts and principles" is employed; the Roadrunner, where "commitment and implementation of total quality principles can demonstrate significant progress in building sound and notable progress," and

the New Mexico Zia Quality Award, where an applicant "has demonstrated through their practice and achievements, the highest level of quality excellence." The award is based upon the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award created by Public Law 100-107 and is named after Malcolm Baldrige, Secretary of Commerce 1981-1988. Baldrige's managerial excellence contributed to long-term improvement in efficiency and effectiveness of government.

"We ... congratulate all the businesses and organizations for their Roadrunner and Piñon Recognition. These organizations play a major role in energizing New Mexico's economy, competitiveness and quality of life," said Quality New Mexico President Julia Gabaldon.

NASA Manager Joe Fries said of the award, "Congratulations to each of you for a well-deserved recognition, and I thank you for your part in making WSTF what it is today."

Moira Romansky, committee member, said that the effort to apply for the

Roadrunner Award, "was a terrific learning experience. Candy Brown, Alan Spencer, and Donna Nelson helped us focus on our processes with their incredible experience in auditing and reviewing other applications. Without their expertise, we would not have focused on the many details needed for our process application, which gave us the chance to be accepted. And special thanks needs to be given to Ken Schaaf for keeping us on course throughout the process."

About the process, Spencer said his department had to "demonstrate a measurable progress in improvement" from the Piñon award that his department received last year. "We focused on a critical few points in relationship to the criteria: leadership and strategic planning. We looked at where we had started, then at where we are now." Of the overall improvements in the department's customer satisfaction, Spencer said, "We wanted to maintain our current workload, yet grow with new opportunity."

To achieve this end, Spencer looked at the difference between customer expectations as compared to the Engineering Department's customer satisfaction. In most instances, the department had considerable room for improvement.

Another critical aspect of the award was the department's attention to its financial performance to the institutional budget. "In 1996, we missed the budget target by 5 percent, but in 2000, we only missed by .22 percent."

Human Resources was an area of critical importance in winning the award. Spencer measured employee turnover and advancement and training opportunities. "In our industry, 12 percent of the workforce leave their company for a variety of reasons, but for the

Engineering Department, employee turnover rested at a scant 5 percent, promotions accounted for an additional 3 percent," he said.

HTSI Program Manager Bob Baker said, "The improvement in quality measured by the Malcolm Baldrige criteria is a measurable improvement in quality for our site." Baker believes that the "process for applying is an all-encompassing effort that looks at vision, strategic planning, and performance." He continued, "the Baldrige Criteria for Quality lays the issues out on the table and forces you to focus on the customer feedback, then use this data to make decisions." Baker understood the Roadrunner award to be a "tremendous effort and made us realize we did have a way of measuring our progress and balancing our internal customer's satisfaction with our external customer's needs."

Spencer's advice to employees and employers is "to understand your customer's customer. It is not enough to understand the direct recipient of your work." He believes that the White Sands Test Facility has a unique situation. "Here, NASA is the stakeholder of the resources, the capital, and equipment. Yet, we must realize that our internal customers have to satisfy their own NASA customers; therefore, we must know and understand the needs of our customer's customer."

Employees' satisfaction in their own work must be paramount. "Employees who are comfortable in their jobs and feel needed are employees who respond better and faster to their customer." Spencer correlated this statement with the analogy of the waiter who works at a nice restaurant with a good chef and a great atmosphere, but who extends lousy service to the customer because of the waiter's bad day, which leads to the customer having a less-than-perfect dinner. "A good manager would have recognized the problem immediately and taken action to keep the customer's satisfaction," Spencer said. ■



The Quality New Mexico Roadrunner Application Committee worked diligently on the criteria submitted for the award.