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William Farrow
256-895-1693
william.farrow@usace.army.mil

Center supports Afghan recycling program

HUNTSVILLE, Ala.-- Huntsville Center's International Operations Division is working with partners to help bring recycling and reusing initiatives to Afghanistan partners.

The environmental support contract with AECOM, a professional technical and management support services firm, establishes a recycling program which combines waste management with economic development and social contribution in Afghanistan.

Project manager Bruce Railey, Huntsville Center IO division, said the program supports an economic development strategy by partnering with Afghans to build sustainable Afghan businesses surrounding waste recycling that extends beyond U.S. military installations there and into local communities.

He said besides typical waste recycling, the program also reduces the solid waste stream by incinerating large quantities of unsorted solid wastes at military facilities.

"The integrated solid waste management programs center on source segregation, collection and reuse, and waste composting projects diverting tons of waste and emissions from burn pits to incinerators and reduces fuel usage," Railey said.

According to Railey, first year program results of the contract include additional local business opportunities, establishment of segregation and reuse contracts, vendors for recyclables in multiple locations, and projects for treating petroleum contaminated soil associated with the burn pits.

Suzanne Thomas-Cole, AECOM associate program director said AECOM currently has 10 recycling specialists deployed in Afghanistan developing and implementing recycling initiatives in an environment with limited infrastructure for recyclable materials.

"We won an award under the Huntsville Center Worldwide Environmental Remediation Services contract for environmental management support that consisted of finding and mobilizing 10 recycling professionals to perform as recycling specialists for USFOR-A," she said.

Since June the specialists have been deployed to locations throughout Afghanistan. Thomas said at most installations solid waste is dumped into pits, covered with fuel and burned. In a few instances, waste is disposed of in poorly operating burn boxes and incinerators.

"Burn pits create serious air pollution problems around the camps and bases not to mention personnel exposure issues to the smoke and particulate," Thomas said.

However, by implementing recycling programs Thomas said AECOM reduces what is being burned by at least 60 percent.

"In fact, we believe that we can eventually eliminate the burn pits with this program," she said. "Our numbers tell us that we can also substantially improve the operations of their incinerators by removing the wet waste (food waste) that they are now trying to burn," she said.

There is plan for development of a food waste composting program at a facility owned and operated by an Afghan women's partnership--resulting in 60 new jobs for the Afghan community.

Thomas also said there is significant cost savings to the Army in each of the initiatives and the plan is to eventually use incinerators built in country to reduce the use of very costly decrease the hazards associated with fuel transport in country.

Railey said one of the most important aspects of the program is the counter insurgency angle to this initiative.

"We're providing opportunities for local Afghans to develop businesses based on this recycling program and carrying it beyond the Army fence-line to local cities and towns," Railey said.

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