Jason Cochran sidebar

Former shipyard worker thankful for Recovery Act job

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act-funded worker Jason Cochran is much happier helping clean up old buildings at the U.S. Department of Energy's Paducah Site than he was during his previous 13 years as a shipyard worker.

"I'm a different person," said Cochran, 33, of Reidland, the father of an 11-year-old girl. "My wife can tell a big difference in my attitude each day when I come home."

After working in dangerous, inclement river conditions, being in a safety-first job culture for DOE environmental cleanup contractor LATA Environmental Services of Kentucky, LLC, is one key reason for job satisfaction, he says. Helping clean up old, contaminated buildings so that they can be demolished is another.

More than 800 employees of cleanup contractors, subcontractors and vendors have received at least some Recovery Act compensation at the plant since the DOE received about $79 million in funding through the program in 2009. Many displaced workers found Recovery Act program jobs at the Paducah plant amid a major recession. Others, like Cochran, quit lower-paying jobs to do Recovery Act work for much better wages and benefits.

Cochran said he was impressed with the extensive safety training that he has received and the protective equipment needed to remove contaminated materials from a closed building known as the Feed Plant. The nine-building, 200,000-square-foot complex was used from 1957-1977 to manufacture uranium hexafluoride and fluorine.

LATA-Kentucky's Jeff Seaton and two other supervisors thoroughly explained how to safely deal with various work hazards, Cochran said.

"The work I did at the shipyard aged me a lot," Cochran said. "Now I don't worry about my health."

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Jason Cochran cuts a bolt off a temporary boundary control station in the Feed Plant at DOE's Paducah Site. LATA-Kentucky hired Cochran via American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding.