



AREVA, world energy expert, offers its customers technological solutions for highly reliable nuclear power generation and electricity transmission and distribution.

AREVA employees are committed to continuous improvement on a daily basis, making sustainable development the focal point of the group's industrial strategy.



Since the ESWS project began, there have been a significant number of layoffs at the mine. AREVA; however, has committed to ensuring every mine worker who completed the TOWES test has the opportunity to review their results with the workplace educator and, if they wish to improve their skills, AREVA will assist them with identifying and accessing appropriate training. AREVA recognizes that this is not only a demonstration of their commitment to good corporate citizenship, but it will also be of benefit in future should they expand their workforce. Mine employees who completed TOWES and, in the interim, improved the skills identified as weak, will be more proficient workers, should they reapply for work.



Canada is the world's leading exporter of uranium and hosts three of the top ten producing mines in the world. To place this into perspective, Canada's production of 11,180 tonnes of uranium oxide (U3O8) in 2007 contained more than twice the energy available from Canada's total annual oil production. Total world production of uranium oxide that year was 48,680 tonnes. Canada is the world's largest producer of natural uranium providing 22% of total world production from its Saskatchewan mines in 2007. (Canadian Nuclear Association)

Over the years that the uranium mining industry has been in existence in Canada it has seen dramatic changes in technology and in regulatory requirements. These changes create a demand for a workforce that is increasingly skilled and capable of adapting to rapid change. AREVA Resources Canada Inc., a subsidiary of the AREVA Group, is one of the world's leading uranium exploration, mining and milling companies. The AREVA operation at McClean Lake, Saskatchewan mines and processes uranium ore. The processing mill is one of the most sophisticated in the world.

In 2004, partly in response to requests from the local northern communities and partly in an effort to recruit more highly skilled applicants, the operation began to demand grade 12 as a minimum requirement for new hires. At the same time, incumbent workers were given the opportunity to complete their GED. Unfortunately the grade 12 requirement did not necessarily result in better prepared workers and investigation into other factors that might impact workplace skill acquisition led to the recognition that a workforce with the needed skills and attributes cannot be developed unless workers also have the necessary levels of Essential Skills.

In an effort to help improve the Essential Skills of employees, the training department at McClean Lake began in 2007 to use the TOWES assessment as part of a process to assist GED participants and apprentices in preparing for exams and technical training. Test takers whose scores indicate a need for intervention are offered assistance and support and, since this process has been put in place, all of the AREVA apprentices who have taken technical training have passed their technical exams.

"I think we are just beginning to understand what the assessment can do for us. In future, I believe it will be very useful for recruitment and for succession planning. Workers who want to progress will have information and opportunity to improve weak skills and prepare for advancement "

Mill Operations General Supervisor



In 2008, AREVA was approached by the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST). SIAST was participating in a federally funded initiative known as the Essential Skills Workplace Services (ESWS) project. ESWS was aimed at encouraging employers to integrate Essential Skills into their human resource functions and AREVA decided to undertake a TOWES benchmarking project that would, as a start, highlight the levels of Essential Skills possessed by proficient workers, provide information on skills upgrades needed for incumbent workers and clarify what levels of Essential Skills to seek in new hires. They also committed to providing professional development opportunities for their training staff related to developing training materials that integrate Essential Skills into technical training.

To date, 162 people have written a TOWES G2: mill supervisors; mill trainers; mill and mine workers, including current and potential apprentices; human resources personnel and support staff. Mine management and the onsite union, Communications Energy and Paperworkers' (CEP), were involved and supportive from the start, an element critical to the success of the project. SI-AST assisted by providing an onsite orientation to TOWES and Essential Skills for supervisors and the union was provided with a detailed description of the project, the goals and objectives and an assurance of confidentiality.



Every participating individual was guaranteed:

- there would be no negative repercussions from participation
- individual results would belong to the individual
- training staff would review personal results with each individual
- individuals who wished to improve their skills would be given the opportunity to do so

The next step in the process will be a second project, provincially funded, that will help support AREVA's development of Essential Skills training materials using AREVA's documents and the implementation of the training materials into training provided to the AREVA workforce.

Participation in the project has already yielded positive results. As the Training Coordinator explained, "One very valuable benefit of TOWES is that it recognizes skills developed over a working lifetime. In remote locations such as the north, where access to formal education may have been difficult in the past, this can be critical. Older workers may have very little formal education, but if they have been in the industry for many years and are proficient with the types of information they must understand and use, the TOWES will reflect that proficiency. Having their skills confirmed and recognized is important for self esteem and for encouraging workers to consider moving into better, but more demanding jobs."

McClean Lake has a dedicated training team that is developing a Systematic Approach to Training (SAT) to ensure the operation meets all regulatory and job specific training requirements. In addition to the development team, a dedicated Workplace Education Instructor is readily available to all staff to assist them with training needs, including those identified through TOWES testing. In the words of the Workplace Education Instructor, "TOWES is very helpful to individuals; it gives them a good picture of their skills and of what they need to work on. The TOWES process allowed me to be in touch with people I had not met and who had not previously accessed the learning centre. Through the prep/write/debrief process I had three different opportunities to build relationships and trust. I believe that both the test takers' recognition that TOWES measures their skills in a fair and accurate way and the relationships built through the TOWES process, are directly responsible for the heartening increase in numbers of staff accessing the learning centre – many on their own time."

