

Contractors Tackle Work Force Shortages, Training Issues

Fifteen leading industrial painting contractors from throughout the U.S. initiated a plan to tackle work force shortages at a summit meeting in Pittsburgh on November 30. The Summit was organized by SSPC, with the assistance of JPCL.

The plan includes developing (with SSPC Board approval) a standing SSPC committee on work force issues that will deal with the twin problems of recruiting new employees to industrial painting, and of training existing and new employees.

Chairman of the Steering Committee organizing the Summit was Bruce Henley of Brock Enterprises, who is currently SSPC's vice president. Steering Committee members included David Boyd, Vulcan Industries; Ed Smith, Hartman-Walsh; Tom Dunkin, Dunkin & Bush; and Steve Jeffress, Jeffco Painting. The remaining contractors at the Summit are identified in the photo and caption above.



*Front: Edward C. Smith, Hartman-Walsh Painting Company
Second row, l-r: Richard T. Mann, Charles F. Mann Painting Company; Joseph R. Aguilar, KM Industrial, Inc.; David R. Boyd, Vulcan Painters, Inc.; Chris Kucherawy, John B. Conomos, Inc.
Third row, l-r: Robert M. Herold, Gateway Company; Wayne S. Stoll, Jemm Industries, Inc.; Richard L. Smith, Williams Industrial Services, Inc.; Tom M. Dunkin II, Dunkin & Bush, Inc.
Fourth row, l-r: George Desipris, Olympus & Associates, Inc.; Donald Thomas, Thomas Industrial Coatings, Inc.
Fifth row, l-r: Bob E. Swanson, Swanson & Youngdale, Inc.; Allan DeLange, North American Coatings; J. Bruce Henley, Brock Enterprises, Inc.; Steven T. Jeffress, Jeffco Painting & Coating, Inc.*

in English, drug abuse, and criminal records, the number remaining after screening is often low, and sometimes insufficient for the work at hand. Contractors reported having to turn down work because of the insufficient number of workers, especially with the recent upswing in maintenance activities by large industrial plants.

What Is Being Done Now

Current training and recruitment activities were reviewed. They include those conducted by the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT), American Builders and Constructors (ABC), SSPC, National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER), the Williamson School, and the Institute of Corrosion in the UK. Summit

participants emphasized the importance of SSPC acting as a liaison among these and other entities with an interest in industrial painting.

The Reason for the Shortage

The average age of painters is 50 years or more, according to contractors participating in the Summit. And like other crafts, industrial painting is not attracting enough new workers to replace those who are retiring. The deck is stacked against the crafts because most graduating high school seniors, around 70 percent, are opting for college rather than the trades, according to Department of Labor statistics.

Among the 30 percent of high school students who do not go to college, some portion are not qualified, either by attitude or aptitude, to be crafts people. This leaves a relatively small number each year to fill the open slots in all the crafts as well as the slots open in the military—fierce competition for industrial painting.

Some of the contractors at the Summit expressed concern about finding laborers as well as crafts people. When job applicants for labor slots are screened for contractor and customer requirements, such as literacy

The Approach of the SSPC Committee

“The desire shown by these contractors to attack the work force shortage is the first step in solving the problem,” says Chairman Bruce Henley.

Once the standing committee is approved by the Board, its objectives will be to act as a liaison among all agencies engaged in training and recruitment of industrial painters; develop recruitment resources, such as advertising and PR materials, as well as recruitment trainers; work with educational institutions, such as junior colleges, to establish an associate's degree for crafts persons studying industrial painting topics; develop position papers on work force issues; continue development of education and certification programs for training of applicators and other coatings professionals; and perform other work to elevate the technology of industrial painting.

The group agreed to meet next at the PACE Conference in Dallas, TX, in February 2007.