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Purdue pilots healthy work force initiative

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Purdue University is participating in a pilot program to train manufacturing employees in north-central Indiana how to use the health-care system more efficiently.

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WIRED, or Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development, is working with Purdue's School of Nursing, School of Health Sciences, Department of Health and Kinesiology, and Healthcare Technical Assistance Program to identify which programs lead to improvements in employee health and the control of health-care costs.

"The rising cost of providing health care is a major concern for our local manufacturers," said Allison Bryan, Healthy Workforce Project. "There are some tools that have proven to hold steady or even reduce the premiums manufacturing companies have to pay to provide insurance to employees. We want to identify which training programs work best and have manufacturers put those programs in place."

As many as 750 employees at 12 companies are expected to participate in a six-month program, which will begin in March. Potential topics to be addressed include the wise use of the health-care system, self-care, everyday exercise, weight management, smoking cessation, ergonomics, nutrition, heart health and stress management.

"We will start by analyzing company data, including health-care claims, prescription drug use, worker's compensation claims, safety logs and accident rates, to perform a needs assessment," Bryan said. "Then, from April through October, the Healthy Workforce team will implement customized training programs. Finally, in December and January of 2009, we will reassess the company to see which areas have improved."

Scott Hutcheson, Purdue Center for Regional Development senior associate, said the Healthy Workforce Project serves as a new model of work force development.



Allison Bryan
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that can provide immediate benefits for employees and workers.

"This program creates workers who are health care literate," Hutcheson said. "They will have a new set of skills to help them be better consumers of health care and more productive employees. This is a new, high-value skill set that employers are beginning to demand."

Indiana WIRED is a federal economic and work force development initiative administered by Purdue. It is designed to energize the nation's economy through regional economic development partnerships and work force education and training.

In 2006 the U.S. Department of Labor awarded \$15 million each to 13 West Virginia regions in the United States, including a grant to the Indiana Department of Workforce Development. The grant covers a 14-county Indiana region, which includes Benton, Carroll, Cass, Clinton, Fountain, Fulton, Howard, Miami, Montgomery, Tippecanoe, Tipton, Wabash, Warren and White counties.

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