

Pasadena Citizens' Advisory Council

www.pasadenacac.org

Summary of Tuesday, September 25, 2018 Meeting

PCAC Covers Workforce and Worker Training Topics

When Pasadena Citizens' Advisory Council (PCAC) brainstormed meeting topics for 2018-2019, the future petrochemical industry workforce was of primary interest. PCAC kicked off a series of meetings on that theme in late September with a presentation of facts about workforce needs from Peter Beard of the Greater Houston Partnership and a description of innovative training technology by Mark Staes, LyondellBasell Houston Refinery Training Manager.

Beard serves on the PetrochemWorks steering committee, which focuses on both petrochemical industry and construction jobs. He said employers are the best source of information about the jobs needed in the future. Local petrochemical job openings are created primarily by attrition, such as retirements, and plant expansion. The kind of workforce needed is affected by ever changing factors. For example, the use of digital technology is affecting the kind of industry jobs, and greater use of prefabricated construction is changing the need for construction jobs.

There are not enough skilled crafts people to meet the current demand. People with these specialties, like welders and pipefitters, also move around. Training them in one community does not mean they will stay there. More than ¾ of construction companies have trouble finding workers. Employers are looking not only for more workers but also high-quality workers.

Asked how people find jobs in these industries, Beard said many petrochemical operator and maintenances jobs are filled by people from similar companies. In the case of construction, a recommendation from family and friends is a good way to get a job.

Beard reminded PCAC of something they have heard for more than 5 years: there are good paying jobs available that may require education beyond high school but not a 4-year degree.

Mark Staes, the Training Manager at the LyondellBasell Houston Refinery, described some of the innovations used in training new hires and existing employees. The refinery has a process simulation center where workers using computers are confronted with scenarios that help them learn to operate a chemical production unit, for example, under both normal operations and during a realistic pretend problem. Using a simulator to learn how to respond in an emergency or solve a problem when there is a process upset not only builds skills in problem solving but also confidence. The refinery can use actual past incidents in the simulator to help workers know how to prevent them in the future.

Another innovative technology used at LyondellBasell is 3-D animation of parts of the plant. The animation can be worked into the simulator training. Expanding operator use of small computers when working in the field is being tried to see if it makes their jobs easier.

The presentations ended with a reminder about www.PetrochemWorks.com, a valuable resource for those seeking jobs, sponsored by the East Harris County Manufacturers Association and others.