

People

A vibrant, well-trained and motivated workforce is the backbone of any organization. For ECBC, this holds especially true as each day ECBC scientists and engineers must safely handle extremely toxic materials in order to conduct studies that strengthen our nation's defense against weapons of mass destruction. This requires a high level of personal commitment to the warfighter, national security and the advancement of science and technology.

With its staff expertise, infrastructure and 90-year history, ECBC has the world's single most robust capability in safely working with the world's most toxic materials. Maintaining this unique capability is critical to our nation's defense. In 1999, recognizing that impending retirements could result in a catastrophic loss of institutional knowledge, ECBC began actively recruiting talented scientists and engineers at all levels—from recent college graduates to seasoned professionals. The goal was to attend to the impending loss of experienced personnel with a wave of capable new hires to work alongside them and learn from their expertise. At the completion of FY05 that wave of new hires had swelled to almost 600 new staff members—half of the Center's workforce—and had infused new technical skills and leadership ideas throughout the organization.

At the end of FY05, ECBC's workforce included 1,167 government employees and 396 on-site contractors.

During FY05, ECBC hired 144 new government staff members and lost 61 staff members to retirements or reassignments, leading to a net growth from FY04 of 83 employees. These statistics represent the beginning of a planned slow-down in workforce growth as ECBC has reached its recruiting and hiring goals. And as ECBC's hiring slowed in FY05, the Center's attention turned to employee development and retention activities aimed at senior and future leaders as well as new employees.

Working through the Office of Personnel Management, ECBC brought in experts from C2 and the Hay Group to provide executive coaching for senior leaders in preparation for strategic planning and leadership development activities. This effort was designed to assess the strengths, capabilities and weaknesses of the ECBC senior leadership. The Hay Group conducted 360° evaluations of senior leaders as well as individual coaching. Additionally, high-performing mid-level managers and employees were selected to participate in a Leadership Cohort in FY05. In this program, future leaders of the organization gain perspective on issues affecting the Center, work with senior leadership and closely collaborate with peers on special projects.

In FY05, ECBC launched its second formal mentoring class, which consisted of 12 mentor-protégé teams across all directorates. This nine-month program was designed to provide new employees who have been identified as potential future leaders of the organization with opportunities to access the experience and knowledge of more senior-level staff. Mentees work directly with senior staff members on a variety of in-classroom and informal development assignments.

A major initiative at ECBC in FY05 was the upgrading of internal communications systems. In September a new Intranet that improves Center-wide knowledge management and is a source of up-to-the-minute news was launched. Increased collaboration between teams and a better understanding of ECBC's full capabilities by the workforce are two goals of the Intranet. Leader-to-workforce communication was also increased, through e-mail and quarterly town hall meetings, and by reporting on issues that have impact on the workforce. ECBC is committed to continuously offering development opportunities to staff members and supporting them as they conduct the important work of improving our nation's chemical and biological defensive posture.



People

Spotlight: Rick Decker

On February 14, 2005, Mr. Richard (Rick) Decker II, became ECBC's Director of Engineering and a member of the Senior Executive Service. In this capacity, he oversees the development, engineering and sustainment of chemical and biological defense equipment. Mr. Decker is responsible for approximately 600 employees with expertise in engineering, logistics and acquisition. In both industry and government, his career has focused on work in the areas of protective equipment and smoke/obscuration equipment acquisition. Mr. Decker graduated with a BS degree in chemistry and mechanical engineering from the University of Maryland. He and his wife of 32 years, Sue, who is a physician, have two children.

When did you begin as Director of Engineering and what made you want the job?

I began working as the Director of Engineering on 20 Feb 2005. I wanted an opportunity to help the Engineering Directorate and ECBC workforce and to share my experiences and knowledge from having worked with the Joint Program Executive Office for Chemical and Biological Defense. ECBC is an extraordinary place with exceptional subject matter experts who are passionate and talented across the full spectrum of the chemical and biological defense program. They have met the challenges that faced our Nation during Desert Shield/Storm, after 9-11, and during Operation Enduring Freedom/ Operation Iraqi Freedom and I am very proud to be a part of this organization.

What changes have you made since you became Director?

The first change that I made was to strengthen the Engineering Directorate office. I added structure to address the current and future customer base. Engineering Directorate is 100% customer reimbursable; therefore, our customers are extremely important. I now have three key

managers, AJ Thornton, Deputy Director, William Klein, Resource Management and Life Cycle Support, and Suzanne Milchling, Joint and Interagency Activities that have direct alignment with our customer base. I also established a Leadership Cohort Group at the GS-13 level. I believe that it is important to have a series of generations ready to lead the organization, to be ready for consideration for additional responsibility and authority. We focus on both professionalism and human development in which leadership is a huge part. It is critical to maintain our intellectual knowledge and provide mentors that can shape and mold the new leaders of tomorrow. This is critical since our reputation defines our future.

Tell us about the reorganization of the directorate. How has the reorganization benefited customers and how has it benefited your staff?

I created a straight line of communication between our customers by creating an advocate starting in my front office. In most cases, I allowed the advocate to choose their customer base. This new organization alignment has resulted in several new starts. Client managers approach the customer, offer them ideas of how Engineering Directorate can better support them and the process works. For example, the Filter Alternate Source Qualification program, the customer (the Joint Project Manager Individual Protection and Collection Protection) was contacted and a comprehensive review and identification of possible new alternate filter technology was suggested. They jumped at the opportunity to use this formal acquisition technical approach to take advantage of improvements in technology to expand the life cycle and operational capability of legacy chemical and biological items.



What technical accomplishment are you most proud of during the 2005 timeframe?

I am most proud of the accomplishments when the entire Center works together to solve a problem that will support the Warfighter. Through integration and cooperation from basic research, concept development, and engineering, along with input from the Joint Project Manager for Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Contamination Avoidance, we worked together recently to provide a new sensor detection capability for non-traditional agents in response to an urgent need statement from the Warfighter.

What do you like most about your position?

The most important ingredient of success is the people and I enjoy working both internally and externally with people.

What was your last job?

I served as the Deputy to the Program Executive Officer for Chemical and Biological Defense under BG Stephen V. Reeves, Falls Church, VA which was a developmental assignment which lasted nearly three years. I had an extraordinary experience there which afforded me numerous opportunities to work within the Pentagon and Congressional communities. I would highly encourage anyone to take a developmental assignment to work in the Pentagon, Department of Defense or Other Government Agencies in the Washington D.C. area.

