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## Technical assistance aids Tri-City businesses

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If your company is one of the many businesses based in the Mid-Columbia, you could benefit from a growing Technical Assistance Program (TAP).

The program is administered through Pacific Northwest National Laboratory and the Tri-City Industrial Development Council.

Through its Economic Development Office, PNNL manages the TAP to assist the growth of businesses in local and regional communities, and to attract new businesses to the region.

Federal support comes from two Department of Energy sources - the Energy Research Laboratory Technology Research Program and the Office of Worker and Community Transition 3161 Program.

In the two years since PNNL started the program, about 200 firms have been helped.

The 3161 grant funds are focused on businesses in several counties: Adams, Benton, Franklin, Grant, Klickitat, Walla Walla, Whitman and Yakima in Washington, and Morrow and Umatilla in Oregon.

Virion Technology, for example, is a small company developing a medical patch for painless, effective removal of warts. The invention is about ready for clinical tests after PNNL staff helped develop and manufacture prototypes.

TAP assistance also is benefiting Hanford and other environmental cleanup areas. One spinoff company has received training and guidance as it transfers an environmental technology from PNNL to international markets.

And a Mid-Columbia software developer received what its president calls "critical support" from the lab. Just 40 hours of technical assistance from a PNNL scientist enables the company to meet the terms of a contract with Bechtel on time and under budget.

TAP is attracting the attention of businesses outside the community, and several are interested in relocating to the area. For example, one former Western Washington company has moved to the Tri-Cities to become part of a new high-tech sports equipment sector. PNNL staff helped the company, GateSkate, identify materials and processes for a new kind of off-road in-line skate.

Program support originally was limited to small businesses with fewer than 500 employees. However, size no longer is a limiting factor, said TAP manager Gary Spanner. Moreover, Spanner pointed out, the lab no longer will be the sole source of help.

"The TAP expansion also makes available technical assistance from all the Hanford contractors that choose to participate, as well as from other DOE labs and from NASA," Spanner said. Applying for TAP assistance is simple, Spanner said. Submit a one-page request to PNNL's Economic Development Office, then sign a brief agreement confirming the scope of the work.

TRIDEC and PNNL are sharing marketing and outreach activities for the expanded TAP. The program does not offer services in competition with the private sector and does not include help for business planning, legal aid or other nontechnical needs. To learn how your company can TAP technical resources, contact Gary Spanner at 372-4296 or send e-mail to [ge\\_spanner@pnl.gov](mailto:ge_spanner@pnl.gov). For information about 3161 programs, contact TRIDEC at 735-1000.