

New locomotive to support mission U.S. ARMY ENVIRONMENTAL COMMAND

New locomotive to support mission

By Rob Schuette

Fort McCoy Triad

A new, battery-powered locomotive is moving full speed ahead to further modernize Fort McCoy's capability to perform its rail missions. Joe Schneider, the field service manager for Railpower Hybrid Technologies Corp., of Erie, Pa., which fielded the locomotive to the installation, presented orientation instruction to locomotive crew members in early August. The new locomotive, road number 6003, features lead-acid rechargeable cell batteries; a small, 165-horsepower diesel engine which recharges the batteries, and about 2,000 horsepower of traction motor effort (about 500 horsepower per axle), Schneider said.

"The new locomotive has more horsepower than the current locomotive has," Schneider said. "The new locomotive also will be more environmentally friendly. It will save 40 to 50 percent of fuel use versus a straight diesel-powered engine. It also will have up to a 60 percent reduction in emissions."

Fort McCoy is the fourth Army installation to receive the locomotive, Schneider said. The others are at Barstow, Calif.; Fort Lewis, Wash., and Fort Sill, Okla. Each of those locomotives has been in service for about a year.

Jane Schmidt, Fort McCoy installation Transportation officer, said the process to acquire the new locomotive began about two-and-one-half years ago during a site visit by the Installation Management Agency Northwest Region Chief of Transportation.

"Although we have access to the locomotive owned by the 1152nd Transportation Company of the 88th Regional Readiness Command, I felt we needed to have our own locomotive because of our mission as a power-projection platform," Schmidt said. "The chief of Transportation pushed for us to get it."

The 1152nd and 88th have been very cooperative in scheduling the use of their locomotive and have been supportive of Fort McCoy's mission, Schmidt said. But with the uncertainty existing in the Army Reserve structure, the process will work more smoothly if Fort McCoy has its own locomotive, she said.

The current plans are to keep the 1152nd and 88th's locomotive at Fort McCoy, Schmidt said.

The engineer crews of both locomotives will be responsible for operator maintenance.

Personnel from the Installation Materiel Maintenance Activity (IMMA) will perform unit-level maintenance for the new locomotive, Schmidt said. The 1152nd will continue to do unit-level maintenance for the old locomotive.

The Defense Generator and Rail Equipment Center of Hill Air Force Base, Utah will continue to do an annual inspection for the old locomotive. Schmidt said the organization also will add the new Fort McCoy locomotive to its schedule to perform an annual inspection.

The Fort McCoy locomotive will be used to support the mobilization and demobilization of military equipment and for any units that send their equipment by rail to Fort McCoy to support their training here, she said. Railpower has been in the business of producing new or refurbished locomotives since the late 1990s. Schneider said the company generally starts with the chassis of an old locomotive and uses anything that is still serviceable or can be brought up to operational standards for the Army locomotives it builds. The old locomotive chassis have proven to be very durable and will provide a long-lasting locomotive, he said. "We saved a lot of money by using the existing chassis and any serviceable parts we could," he said. "We've added the new technology available to make it better."

The new locomotive features computer technology, which will make it easier to diagnose any maintenance needs. The basic workings of the new locomotive should be about the same as the old one so general maintenance needs will remain about the same, he said.

Jeff Severson, the locomotive engineer from VT Griffin, contractor for the Directorate of Support Services, said the new locomotive runs much quieter than the older one.

"The locomotive should have better visibility because of its bright red color," he said. "The new locomotive also has more window area, which will allow us to see more than we could before when we were operating the older locomotive."

Jerry Johnson, an engineer/brakeman for VT Griffin, said the new locomotive has different starting procedures but everything else is the same or similar to the older locomotive.

"It has a nice, comfortable seat," Johnson said. "It has both heating and air conditioning capabilities while the older locomotive only has heating."

The new locomotive also has electric windshield wipers and heated glass so it will offer improved visibility during inclement weather, he said.