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## Safety course also helps create jobs

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Kilgore College's Workforce Development Risk Management Institute aims to improve workplace safety and help area workers get better trained for jobs.

The college receives \$100,000 a year from Texas Mutual Insurance company to train area workers in the ins and outs of a safe work environment. The college offers several courses, including OSHA training, HAZMAT training and disaster management, all for free. Classes require a minimum of 10 students to be held, but has as many as 50 students at any given time.

Texas Mutual Senior VP Terry Frakes said Kilgore is the perfect place for these classes. Kilgore College is the third college to be offered Texas Mutual's risk management grants.

"When we were looking for another area, East Texas stuck out," Frakes said. "Oil fields and transportation jobs are some of the most dangerous work places, and Kilgore fit right in there."

More than 1,000 area workers from 40 counties have taken advantage of the safety courses. Frakes said worker safety needs to be at the forefront of employers' minds. He said worker's compensation is unlike most other insurances, because once an employee is hurt on the job, he may receive lifetime medical benefits.

"If (employers) can control their losses by training their people and monitor their safety, the less chance there is people will get hurt on the job," Frakes said. "But as successful as the program is, a lot of employers don't know about it."

Kilgore College Workforce Assistant Director Gem Meachum said prevention is the key. Meachum also said the training program has given many unemployed people the opportunity to find work. Workers seeking employment and need training can get it right away, Meachum said.

"The Gulf spill brought in people who needed to clean up toxic waste, but many either needed the 24-hour HAZMAT course or the eight-hour refresher," Meachum said. "We added it, and enabled workers to go to the Gulf and get jobs to help clean up."

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