

Air Force Materiel Command Engineers and Scientists

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Air Force Materiel Command

Senior leadership within the Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC) as well as the Air Force has emphasized initiatives to recruit, retain, and develop highly skilled and knowledgeable engineers and scientists capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century. The AFMC, which employs about 70 percent of the total Air Force engineering occupation, is committed to pursuing every avenue available to ensure that it acts on all the appropriate initiatives to take care of this critical part of our workforce.

One of the Air Force Materiel Command's (AFMC) key objectives is to continue its crucial leadership role in technology. The AFMC is a champion for science and technology, becoming the advocate and ally for leveraging new technologies. Its science and engineering (S&E) workforce is having a tremendous impact on everything it does in the Air Force, both what is currently in the hands of our warfighters and what will be fielded in the future. It is these talented individuals who will enable continuing world-class technology dominance.

Unfortunately, the extensive downsizing the AFMC experienced during the past 11 years has severely weakened the health of the civilian force and challenges its ability to meet future mission challenges. To meet the needs of an increasingly technical aerospace mission, we need to balance the mix of junior, mid-level, and senior civilians in the proper engineering skills. In order to achieve this goal, this command is faced with multiple challenges in recruitment and retention of highly skilled engineers.

Within the AFMC, there are approximately 10,580 S&E positions, which make up about 70 percent of the total Air Force S&E population¹. The AFMC's S&E workforce is 82 percent civilian and 18 percent military. While its current civilian manning seems to be healthy, it must take a long, hard look at the future.

By 2007, 51 percent of the AFMC's S&E workforce will be eligible for retirement. While not all will retire, historical trends indicate that approximately 20 percent of those eligible to retire will do so the year they become eligible. In addition, the AFMC is competing with the private sector, which entices both potential recruits as well as its existing workforce with financial and quality-of-life incentives. The AFMC is projecting that it will need to hire approximately 3,300 civilian engineers and scientists in the next few years to help fill real and potential gaps.

In an effort to prevent a potential crisis, the AFMC has engaged in a robust recruitment and retention effort. Its initial

approach to the problem will emphasize recruitment and retention bonuses, and explore the possibility of increases in special salary rates for S&Es. Other financial appeals may include paying off student loans and covering the costs for further education. Non-pay issues include a command-wide recruitment program that entails establishing a public Web site that would be a one-stop shopping concept, which would link all of our centers' recruitment efforts to one site. We have also launched a standard entrance and exit survey. These survey tools will capture both the organization's health and shortcomings in its recruiting and retention effectiveness.

In addition, the Air Force is looking to place more emphasis on the civilian workforce through a marketing plan that would create a *total-force* inclusive marketing program. This program would include using a civilian element in the Air Force's marketing efforts aimed at fostering a sense of mission and purpose in all Air Force personnel.

Furthermore, there are several things the AFMC is attempting to put in place to transfer individuals' corporate knowledge prior to them retiring. First, we are aggressively pursuing legislation to introduce *phased retirement* to the workforce. Phased retirement would allow individuals to retire and then come back to work on a part-time schedule to help develop new recruits. Currently, such individuals are penalized since their salary is offset by their annuity. This means it is unattractive for senior executives who may want to work fewer hours to consider returning to the federal government. There is also a provision for gaining a waiver to this requirement. It now requires Office of Personnel Management approval; we are hopeful the waiver approval level will be lowered to the components.

While we are making positive steps toward changes in legislation and policy, these initiatives are currently in the discussion stage and at the present time, no decision has been made to implement any of these ideas. In addition, we are also encouraging our organizations to establish or expand the existing mentoring program to

place new recruits with someone who can foster their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Senior leaders within the AFMC, as well as the Air Force, have emphasized initiatives to "recruit, retain, and develop highly skilled and knowledgeable technical professionals." Within the AFMC, we are pursuing every avenue available to ensure we are taking on all the appropriate initiatives to take care of this critical part of our workforce. ♦

Note

1. Demographic data used in this article are drawn from the Headquarters Air Force file and the Air Force Materiel Command, "AFMC's Scientists & Engineers," *Leading Edge* Oct. 2001.

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