

Operational Energy Day shines light on Army's future

U.S. Army

FORT DEVENS, Mass. (Aug. 8, 2012) -- It is anything but a typical base camp.

In fact, Army Base Camp Integration Laboratory here is a glimpse into the Army's future. On one side of the BCIL, split into two "Force Provider" 150-person camps, testing is under way on innovative technologies to produce and conserve energy, reuse water and dispose of waste.

In an Aug. 8 visit to the BCIL, a number of distinguished guests learned about the work done there during "Operational Energy Day." Operational energy is defined as the "energy and associated systems, information and processes required to train, move and sustain forces and systems for military operations."

Sprinkled around the energy-efficient shelters and structures in the 10-acre compound, the visitors found a micro-grid, an energy storage system, a shower and laundry water reuse system, a waste management system, a solar hot water system, and a power management system.

"These are not staying as just ideas on the shelf," said Sharon Burke, assistant secretary of Defense for Operational Energy. "They're making it into the hands of Soldiers today. This is win, win, win for the Army and the Soldiers. For me to see this, it's very exciting. It's building on the lessons that we're learning in deployments and building them into the way the Army operates in the future."

The visitors were briefed about the Army's "Smart and Green Energy for Base Camps" initiative, or SAGE, which uses commercial off-the-shelf technologies and is being tested at the BCIL, which opened in June 2011. SAGE, managed by the U.S. Army Logistics Innovation Agency, is exploring whether energy savings from 30 to 60 percent are possible at base camps for 600 to 3,000 Soldiers.

"It really is amazing, the wide variety of things here that are being demonstrated and then fielded in a very short time frame," said Katherine Hammack, assistant secretary of the Army, Installations, Energy and Environment. "Our intent is to leverage technology in a way that makes the mission much more effective."

Since April, more than 300 service members training at Devens have stayed at the BCIL and provide their input on what is being tested there.

"This is about mission effectiveness and mission enablers and teaching Soldiers that being energy smart doesn't mean it's going to sacrifice or jeopardize some of the comforts or some of the ways they've been taught to war fight," Hammack said.

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Lt. General Raymond V. Mason, the Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics, said innovations spawned by the BCIL could help keep resupply convoys off the roads, saving lives.

"Obviously, we've got to continue to execute our military missions," Mason said. "And we think that by reducing the demand and usage of fuel and water, it'll make us even more effective on the battlefield."

Real-time data collected at the BCIL can help accelerate the fielding of systems that cut fuel consumption in Afghanistan.

"In a lot of instances, we're getting the right data to make the right decisions," said Kevin Fahey, with the Program Executive Office Combat Support & Combat Service Support. "It really is about energy efficiency and quality of life, because it's a base camp. It's really to enhance the mission that the Soldiers are on the base to do."

The BCIL is just the beginning of the effort, according to Mason.

"It isn't like we're going to be done with operational energy in a year or two years," Mason said. "We'll keep raising the bar, and we'll keep pushing it as far as technology will allow us to take it."

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