



# News Release

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## **New technology revolutionizes NMCC campus safety and assists in efforts to go green**

**Aroostook County** - Northern Maine Community College has brought the concept of workplace safety to the forefront by unveiling a new innovative electronic safety system. With the help of 25 new Hewlett Packard mini notebooks purchased through a grant from The Risk Management Division of the Maine Bureau of Labor Services, NMCC now offers “barrier free” access to a variety of safety facts about products used everyday on campus.

Every consumer product present at institutions, from Ajax to Windex, comes with a fact sheet attached to it; this sheet is known as the product’s Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS). The sheet displays facts about the chemicals found in the product purchased as well as what to do if the product is ingested or gets into a person’s eyes.

Previously, the MSDS printouts for items such as chemicals for the college laboratories ranging from chemistry and biology to welding and automotive technology, along with various other materials including cleaning products located on the NMCC campus, were logged and stored in large three ring binders spread throughout the college.

The purpose of the binders was to provide faculty and staff with instructions for the appropriate actions to take if an emergency occurred. For example, if a student was to get a chemical in his/her eyes, the hard copy of the MSDS sheet would be used to inform them of the length of time needed at the eye wash station to fully rid the eyes of the chemical in question.

Unfortunately, campus officials found that binders were becoming outdated faster than new product information was being received. The binders were in constant need of updating—a rather challenging task which required that paper printouts be made every time a product was improved or discontinued.

“Each department is responsible for their own supplies, making it difficult to pinpoint and track new materials brought on campus,” said Barry Ingraham, NMCC director of physical plant and technology. “The organization of this type of information lacks a globalized structure, leaving it open to each individual institution as to how the information is displayed.”

Since OSHA (Occupational Health and Safety Administration) requires that all products housed within the workplace be cataloged and that the information be available to employees in case of emergency, Ingraham, along with a team of faculty and staff, decided it was time to create an electronic safety system that would allow for easier access to product MSDS information, at all times.

The team decided that the best way to increase information accessibility was to create a master database of all the chemicals and materials used at the college and then make that database available on campus at various “walk up” locations. The notebooks are easily visible within each department to provide quick access. Although the mini notebooks serve as the main source of the information the master database can also be accessed by other campus computers as well.

The major difference between a standard campus computer and a notebook is that the notebook allows the user to gain access to the database “barrier free,” without the use of a user login. Each HP Mini contains a copy of the master database as well as an independent web browser. The new technology allows for instructors and students alike to quickly access product information on an as needed basis without the hassle of fumbling through a large bulky binder.

After working through the logistics of the idea the team then needed to secure the funds to purchase the HP mini notebooks that would be used to store the safety information. Through a \$6,500 grant awarded to NMCC by Risk Management, the college was able to purchase the twenty five computers needed to see the project through to completion.

“With all of the issues in keeping paper copies of Material Safety Data Sheets, we knew we wanted to have an electronic version. Due to the low cost of netbooks, using open source software, and a grant from Risk Management we were able to make the change,” Ingraham said. “This innovation melds safety and technology and allows for greater access to important information. The project is important because it provides fast access and accurate information to students and employees in an emergency.”

The project was created to improve both the accessibility and reliability of OSHA regulated safety information found on campus. The new system can be easily updated by keying in new product data into the main data base, from there the new information is automatically uploaded to all of the twenty five surrounding mini notebooks.

Ingraham indicates the response to the project has been positive. Along with providing the campus with a more user friendly service, the project also goes a step further to help in NMCC’s ongoing efforts to go green.

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*Members of the Northern Maine Community College information technology staff and campus safety committee members display two of the 25 new mini notebook computers that now contain material safety data information on campus, as well as one of the large three-ring binders the computers have replaced. Pictured (from left to right) are Dave Guerrette, occupational safety instructor; Barry Ingraham, director of physical plant and technology; Robert Smith, information systems support specialist II; Karl Jackson, business technology instructor; and Shawn Lahey, information systems support specialist I.*