



CASE STUDY

ERGON-West Virginia Improves Safety and Training Processes

How partnering with FOCUS Learning helped close training gaps and build a stronger, more scalable workforce development system

INTRODUCTION

Faced with significant challenges in training consistency, demographic shifts, and an absence of local skilled talent, ERGON, a refinery located in rural West Virginia, sought a solution to revamp its training processes. To address these issues, ERGON partnered with Quality Training Systems of FOCUS Learning Corporation for their expertise in designing effective training programs and implementing centralized training management systems. Through this collaboration, ERGON experienced significant improvements in employee safety, operational quality, and streamlined audit processes.



CHALLENGES

Gaps in Training Consistency

When Tammy Williams inherited the training function as HR and Training Manager at ERGON two years ago, she quickly identified inefficiencies within the existing training structure. Training processes across the refinery lacked consistency, leaving noticeable gaps, particularly in on-the-job training. Content and data were scattered across disconnected legacy systems, making it difficult to establish repeatable processes and ensure consistent outcomes.

Demographic Challenges and Knowledge Retention

In addition to their internal process and systems challenges, ERGON faced ongoing demographic shifts, with an increasing number of experienced workers retiring. This exodus posed a risk of losing critical institutional knowledge, putting pressure on ERGON to train a new generation of employees effectively. Additionally, their location in rural West Virginia presented another challenge—there was no local pool of skilled talent. New hires often began with no prior expertise, requiring comprehensive, in-house training from the ground up.

High Turnover in Entry-Level Roles

ERGON's entry-level Oil Movement Operator E role, which experienced the highest hiring volume, had a high turnover rate. These operators frequently moved on to other internal roles or left due to retirements, emphasizing the need for proper training to create a reliable talent pipeline and maintain operational efficiency.

TRAINING CONTENT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

- ✓ Job Task Analysis
- ✓ Define Learning Objectives
- ✓ Create Training Map
- ✓ Develop Content
- ✓ Implement w/ Centralized System

SOLUTION

ERGON engaged FOCUS Learning to address these challenges through a two-pronged approach—developing robust training content for the Oil Movement Operator E role and implementing a centralized training management system to manage all training data and processes effectively.

Training Content Development

Recognizing the importance of the Oil Movement Operator E role, ERGON and FOCUS Learning collaborated to create a highly structured initial training program that involved:



Job Task Analysis:

FOCUS Learning worked with a group of subject matter experts to map out every task related to the role. This ensured comprehensive coverage of necessary skills and knowledge areas.



Learning Objectives:

Specific learning objectives were defined to match the job's requirements, ensuring employees could perform safely and effectively.



Training Map:

A roadmap of core training topics was created, offering a sequential, big-picture view of the curriculum. This included technical skills, safety protocols, and even foundational knowledge such as hand tool usage and basic math.

This structured approach allowed the training program to address critical gaps while ensuring new hires were prepared for the challenges of their roles.

Centralized Training Management System

FOCUS Learning introduced a centralized platform, Quality Training Database (QTD), to unify ERGON's training processes, replacing disjointed legacy systems. While implementation was initially delayed by a maintenance outage, QTD provides a single landing point to track trainee progress, store critical data, and ensure consistent, repeatable outcomes.



KEY TAKEAWAY

From inconsistent, disconnected training to a clear roadmap and centralized system—this transformation strengthened safety, consistency, and accountability.

RESULTS

The benefits of FOCUS Learning's training content and systems have already become evident:

Improved Safety

The structured training program directly mitigates safety risks by teaching employees how to handle hazardous situations effectively. For example, employees now receive clear instructions on tasks like opening pressurized railcar hatches and conducting safe shift changeovers. Tammy Williams noted that structured training ensures new hires are no longer improperly trained by less experienced peers, reducing the likelihood of accidents.

Quality and Operational Efficiency

Standardized operator procedures have helped ERGON minimize errors in tasks like product sampling, preventing downstream inefficiencies and reducing the risk of out-of-spec products reaching customers.

Positive Audit Outcomes

The training documentation developed by FOCUS Learning proved beneficial during Process Safety Management (PSM) and ABS (ISO 9000) audits. Detailed job task analyses and training roadmaps demonstrated to auditors that ERGON had implemented a solid, structured qualification process. "The auditors were impressed," Tammy shared, "as it shows the substance behind qualification."



WORKING WITH FOCUS LEARNING

Tammy Williams praised the collaboration, describing working with FOCUS Learning as “an amazing experience.” The FOCUS Learning team’s ability to adapt their expertise to ERGON’s unique refinery operations and their knack for simplifying complex tasks left a lasting impression on Tammy’s team.

FOCUS Learning’s collaborative engagement with subject matter experts ensured diverse perspectives were captured during the training program design phase. According to Tammy, “The key is getting the right folks in the room.” This holistic view resulted in a comprehensive and well-rounded program. Despite early apprehension about the scale of the project, FOCUS Learning’s methodical approach and ability to address concerns helped drive the partnership forward. Tammy emphasized the ease of working with FOCUS Learning, noting their ability to deliver high-quality content with minimal revisions.

LOOKING AHEAD

With the maintenance outage behind them, ERGON is preparing to resume the system implementation in full. Tammy is also eager to explore further collaboration with FOCUS Learning to develop training programs for other critical refinery roles, such as maintenance instrument technicians. The technical complexity of these positions and the lack of local talent continue to make in-house training essential, and ERGON believes FOCUS Learning is the right partner to meet this demand.

CONCLUSION

ERGON’s partnership with FOCUS Learning represents a significant step forward in addressing critical training challenges. By developing a structured training program for the Oil Movement Operator E role and introducing a centralized training management system, FOCUS Learning has helped ERGON improve safety, maintain operational quality, and strengthen their workforce’s capabilities. Beyond immediate results, ERGON’s commitment to continuous improvement positions it as a forward-thinking refinery ready to tackle future challenges with confidence.

Contact us today to learn more or get a custom quote for Managed Training Services.

contact.us@focuslearning.com
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