



Applied Science
Technologists & Technicians
of British Columbia



News Release

For Immediate Release
Aug. 4, 2009

Future of industry depends on more young women entering technology profession

Misconceptions, glass ceiling hinder women's pursuit of this lucrative career path

While many young women will soon head back to school to pursue a post-secondary education, not enough of them will consider a career in the lucrative and in-demand profession of applied science and engineering technology.

Yet changing this trend is crucial to industries reliant on technology workers and currently facing labour shortages which will worsen as baby boomers retire over the next 10 to 15 years. Women represent a vital but underutilized labour force.

According to the Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta (ASET), only 10.5 per cent of its membership is female. The Applied Science Technologists & Technicians of British Columbia (ASTTBC) recently conducted a survey on women in technology and assessed a similarly low proportion of female members at only nine per cent.

In the 2009 Engineering and Technology Labour Market Study, Engineers Canada and Canadian Council of Technicians and Technologists identified imbalances in the engineering and technology labour market, and recommended ensuring labour supply by specifically addressing the gender imbalance.

Liz McDonald, an Edmonton-based certified engineering technologist (CET) with more than 15 years' experience and a current focus on environmental regulatory affairs, believes that educating girls about this exciting career path while they are still in high school is vital.

"It's important to educate young women about the opportunities that exist in the technical field at a time when they're starting to make those decisions that will impact their future career paths. A science background can open the door to many exciting and rewarding careers in this field. The challenge is to raise awareness of the kinds of careers that are out there. I feel that women currently working in this field can play an effective role in this as well as in sharing the sense of pride and accomplishment that comes with a technical career," said McDonald.

Nancy Fowler of Parksville, BC is an applied science technologist (AScT) and a veteran of this male-dominated profession, having spent 30 years in the field. Her entrée into the technology profession was encouraged by her father who nurtured her interest in electronics from a young age. She was the

only woman in her two-year electronics technology program in the 1970s and found both school and the early years of her career a proving ground for her abilities.

“One of my first instructors had a negative attitude toward me and gave me assignments that were not at the same level as my classmates, even though I’d been a top honors student in high school. But once he realized I was bright and capable and serious about being there, he started treating me as an equal. I had that same experience in every job I had for the next several years,” said Fowler.

Both Fowler and McDonald agree that this rewarding career may lack appeal for young women who may be intimidated by the physical environment and “old boys club” culture that continues to exist within some occupations and/or work sites. Good mentors and instructors and a passion for their work enabled them to thrive, but getting a new generation of young women into this field continues to be a challenge.

“Recognizing that more needs to be done to support young women in establishing a career in technology, ASET has identified this as a priority in our strategic planning. Staff resources have been dedicated to discerning how best to proceed, and ASET has openly advocated for programs from government and employers to encourage and support women to enter the ASET professions,” said ASET CEO Barry Cavanaugh.

“Supportive efforts to assist with the challenges faced by women entering the technology field would be to provide opportunities for them to network, and to open up a discussion forum and establish a mentoring program. A request to industry would be the provision of respectful workplace training to ensure equal treatment of all staff,” said ASTTBC executive director John Leech.

“There are outstanding career options with interesting work and great compensation open to women in the professions represented by ASET, ASTTBC and similar organizations. It is in the interest of Albertans, British Columbians and Canadians overall to see a change in the levels of women in these fields,” added Cavanaugh.

Representing approximately 17,000 technicians and technologists across Alberta, ASET provides its members the certification that top employers demand. ASET members play an integral role in driving the Alberta economy and their innovation is one reason why the province maintains its competitive advantage. ASET members represent a wide range of sectors including avionics, biomedical, chemical, computers, electrical, environmental, geological, instrumentation, oil and gas, and telecommunications. www.aset.ab.ca.

Representing approximately 9,000 BC technology professionals, ASTTBC’s mission is to serve the public by regulating and supporting technology professionals’ commitment to a safe, healthy, and sustainable society and environment. www.asttbc.org.

-30-

Media Contact:
Michele Penz, Calico Communications for ASET and ASTTBC
778.888.2249

