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Universities launch composites infrastructure program

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West Virginia University (WVU) and Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey (RU), have announced a National Science Foundation (NSF) sponsored program to help develop composite materials for integration into infrastructure applications. The universities are continuing to seek support for the program, which is described as an industry/university cooperative research center.

An industrial recruitment meeting was held on Oct. 21-22 in Morgantown, W.V. to gain support for the Center for the Integration of Composites into Infrastructure (CICI), a proposed NSF-sponsored I/UCRC. During the meeting, a group of industry representatives met with WVU, RU and NSF to learn more about CICI's operation, benefits to industry and preliminary research projects. Industry members evaluated the proposed research and narrowed the proposed projects down to a list that would allow for both short term and long-term benefits to both the member companies and the industry as a whole.

A wide range of R&D projects are being considered for implementation. For the start-up of CICI, the following projects are at the forefront: 1) Manufacture, design and implementation of flat panels and structural shapes, 2) FRP panels that can withstand blast, fire and cutting, 3) Strength, fatigue-life and durability of composites, 4) Nondestructive evaluation of FRP composites using IRT and GPR techniques, 5) Resin design for fire safety requirements and 6) Hybrid organic/inorganic polymer FRP composites for improving fire resistance of structural members. Additional R&D work is being considered as a part of CICI's development.

CICI will focus on ushering applications of composites in civil and military infrastructure to the next level through collaborative efforts between WVU and RU. The focus areas will synergize different fibers and polymers to create new application areas; thus expanding market potential. In August 2008, the NSF approved a Planning Grant to allow CICI to continue formal development of the Center and recruit industry membership.

As with all centers in the NSF I/UCRC program, the center will be funded and guided by industry and local, state and federal government organizations in terms of an Industrial Advisory Board (IAB). The IAB will provide funding in the form of annual membership fees, which range from \$15,000 per year for Associate Membership (small businesses) to \$40,000 per year for Full Membership. The primary benefit of center membership is the ability to leverage research and development investments through the cooperation of industrial, university and government entities resulting in lower R&D costs by eliminating or reducing overhead fees and royalties and access to supplemental NSF funding.

Letters of commitment from industry and government members must be

received by Jan. 12, 2009, to meet NSF deadlines, although membership fees will not be due till the second half of 2009. The final research agenda will be determined at the first meeting of the Industrial Advisory Board, which is planned for mid-2009.

For more information, visit www.cemr.wvu.edu/cfc/cici/, call 304-293-7608 or e-mail cfc@mail.wvu.edu.

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