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Terman's 'moles' rejoice over basement renovations

BY LORI HOWE



- [Civil and Environmental Engineering](#)

SEARCH go

VIDEOS

Video Archive

NEWS

University Affairs

Humanities

Medical Center

Sci/Tech

Social Sciences

Business

Teaching/Students

Staff News

Cardinal Chronicle

PEOPLE

In Print & On Air

Obituaries

Awards

On the Move

EVENTS

Today's Events

Upcoming Events

Recreation

Academic Calendar

FOR THE RECORD

Faculty Senate

Board of Trustees

Speeches

Crime Statistics

Ph.D. Orals

OPINION

Vantage Points

Letters

CLASSIFIEDS

Employment

Housing

Carpools

SPORTS

Latest Scores

Grad students and postdocs who toil in the basement of the Terman Engineering Center fondly refer to themselves as "the moles." Hidden away in dark offices and labs -- many of them analyzing soil and the groundwater -- the name seems somewhat fitting.



Dale Pelletier, a postdoctoral student in the School of Engineering, sterilized equipment over a Bunsen burner in the newly renovated laboratory beneath the Terman Engineering Center. The Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering held an open house last month to celebrate the renovation and redesign. Photo: Kevin Scheirer

The moles and their colleagues on the faculty and staff finally had cause to rejoice last month when the department of Civil and Environmental Engineering (CEE) held an open house to celebrate the renovation and redesign of an entire wing of teaching and research laboratories in the basement of Terman. More than 80 faculty, students and corporate personnel toured the bright new facilities - home of the department's Environmental Engineering and Science (EES) program.

The three-year renovation was underwritten by a \$2 million grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, a \$1 million donation from the Ford Motor Co. and additional support from CEE.

The remodeled wing -- which will be used by seven faculty and their research groups -- contains more than a dozen new lab benches equipped with state-

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of-the-art equipment. With approximately 75 graduate students plus 10 postdoctoral fellows and research staff, EES is a major academic and research program in the department.

"The lab renovation comes at an important time," said Alfred M. Spormann, associate professor of civil and environmental engineering, who initiated the project in 1998.

"It shows Stanford's commitment to environmental issues," Spormann added, noting that the labs had not been upgraded in 20 years.

He pointed out that the renovations are part of a larger Stanford commitment to environmental research in groundwater and soil contamination. For example, one lab has been redesigned to accommodate large-scale simulations of groundwater recharge. The lab -- equipped with long glass columns to model groundwater filtration through soil -- is part of a major groundwater project funded by the National Science Foundation to develop advanced materials for water purification.

According to Spormann, the current trend in environmental science is to focus on pollution prevention, not just on the cleanup of polluted sites. As a result, traditional methods are being replaced by new approaches such as "green chemistry," designed to develop nontoxic manufacturing techniques, and bioremediation, which uses molecules and genetically engineered microbes to clean up environmental contaminants.

During the Terman open house, visitors observed some of the new equipment in action, including special chambers for growing microorganisms, autoclaves for sterilization, DNA microarrays and microscopes. An upgraded gas chromatograph and mass spectroscopy system also was on display.

Brain Carilli, a facilities service administrator in the Capital Planning and Management department, assisted in the lab design.

"We are extremely grateful to the donors, planners and builders who made this possible," added Craig Criddle, associate professor of civil and environmental engineering. "The completion of these long-awaited renovations has created an upsurge of positive feelings among students, staff and faculty and has given our research programs added momentum."



This article was written by Lori Howe, manager of the Stanford Biofilm Research Center in Terman Engineering.

