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USACE considers new austere standards for construction in Afghanistan

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers builds strong and builds smart. In Afghanistan, building strong and smart means constructing cost-effective facilities that meet the needs of Afghans, and are easy to operate and maintain over the life of the facilities.

Spurred by the deadline to transition responsibilities for security in Afghanistan to Afghan forces by 2014, USACE's Afghanistan Engineer District-South met with Regional Command South's battle space owners, mentors, and engineers in August 2011 to map out a strategy to evaluate remaining planned construction and determine the best way forward to support the planned transition.

“We needed to focus on how the district could construct faster, decrease fuel consumption, and increase the overall sustainability of facilities for Afghans,” said Steve Osborne, an engineering section chief at the district. “Jeff Usavage, the district's Afghan National Police program manager, gathered a team of the district's architects, engineers and ANP project managers together to developed recommendations for achieving these goals.

“For Afghan National Army and Police facilities, we need to build facilities that Afghans are accustomed to,” said Osborne. “That means constructing austere buildings that maximize the use of locally available materials, simple architectural features, low energy lighting and climate control systems and efficient water systems.”

NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan/Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan is currently evaluating the USACE's new austere standard recommendations. If implemented, the district will apply the standards to projects that are in the early stages of construction and all future projects.

“We have standard designs for a variety of Afghan National Police buildings,” said Steve Karwan, a district architect. “If we adopt austere standards, the district will update many of these existing designs with a variety of changes that will improve value and allow the facilities to be more easily sustained long into the future.”



Afghan National Police assemble for instruction at their compound in southern Afghanistan. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recently completed this compound at Mohammed Sayed to enable the Government of Afghanistan to provide for the security of its citizens. (USACE Photo)

The austere design plan is not without challenges. Integrating austere changes means coordinating closely with stakeholders including the customers, regional commands, regional support commands, battle space owners, Afghan National Police mentors and the end users. “We are continually looking to improve processes and deliver quality facilities,” said Fred Schelby, the austere standard transition team lead. “The district strives to integrate feedback and apply lessons learned to each new project we undertake. Our austere design recommendations are the result of these efforts.”

The primary goals of the new austere standard designs are to turn over facilities that can be operated and maintained by Afghans, offer a more normal living experience and have more affordable first-costs of construction and life-cycle costs of operation said Col. Benjamin Wham, district commander. “USACE is here to build facilities that enable the Afghan government to provide security and stability for the people of Afghanistan. We want to make the transition from coalition forces security to Afghan forces as easy as possible and by incorporating lessons learned to the construction we have remaining, our ANSF partners and all of Afghanistan will benefit.”

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USACE’s Afghanistan Engineer District-South provides design and construction services throughout southern Afghanistan to support the International Security Assistance Force and U.S. Forces-Afghanistan. The work is carried out in Regional Commands South, Southwest and West with the goal of achieving counterinsurgency effects and bolstering the Afghan Government’s services to its people.

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