PG&E Diverse Suppliers Innovate for Cost Savings and Environmental Sustainability

By Tony Khing

If you've ever done yard work, you know soil is heavy. Weighing nearly a ton per cubic yard, soil can be unwieldy and when it gets wet, feels more like cement when trying to move it.

But excavating and transporting soil is an essential part of **Pacific Gas & Electric Company's (PG&E**) operations when replacing or repairing gas pipelines. Traditionally, PG&E and its contractors used a combination of water and a high-powered vacuum—called a hydrovac—to remove the soil surrounding the pipes.

The wet soil is taken to an off-site location, treated and sent to a landfill. This process uses a lot of water and gasoline by the trucks. It's time-consuming and costly, not to mention increasing our carbon footprint and landfill. And inefficiently uses time to move and treat the soil.

But PG&E supplier **Bradley Tanks, Inc.** (BTI), a minority woman-owned business enterprise, didn't see a pile of wet dirt. They saw a mountain of opportunity.

BTI President and CEO **Sharon Bonner** found new dry vacuum equipment being used in Europe, imported it to America, and incorporated it into their work for PG&E.

"The dry vac system brings up the soils in a dry state. So we don't have the mud, the slurry, the wet spoils that have to be trucked off-site and disposed into a landfill," said Bonner. "The material can be kept and reused on-site or it can be

taken off and reused at another time. It's a clean material."

Through BTI, PG&E became the first American energy company to use this new equipment to recycle soil in a more cost-effective and environmentally friendly way. BTI's innovation resulted in millions of dollars in savings for PG&E in one year while reducing landfill waste and the carbon footprint.

"We saw this as a very viable alternative that would be more cost-efficient, more efficient in time and environmentally safer," added Bonner.

Bonner

BTI's cutting-edge approach and their ability to affordably deliver high-quality services earned them the company's 2016 Gas Supplier of the Year Award. Their efforts are another proof point of how diverse suppliers, who've accounted for $2 billion-plus in spend for the last six years and more than 40 percent of PG&E's total spend in each of the last five years, bring value to PG&E.

"We're really excited that it was a diverse supplier, a minority woman-owned business, that was the first to bring this innovative technology, really disruptive technology, from Germany to the United States," said PG&E Director of Supply Chain Responsibility, **Joan Kerr**. "They're a perfect example of how diverse suppliers are helping us become more safe, affordable, reliable and clean."

PG&E recognized the importance of being innovative in a constantly changing world by introducing the "Future Proofing Your Business" training initiative last year. The program profiles diverse suppliers like BTI, who've shown ingenuity and educates other diverse businesses on how to establish an innovation mindset and business culture.

"In general, diverse suppliers tend to be more innovative," said Kerr. "They've had to be in order to succeed. Fifty percent of small businesses survive longer than five years. Less than a third survive longer than 10 years. Those who prosper have done so by being innovative, agile, [and] nimble and by looking at different ways of reducing costs and increasing value. They bring an entirely different perspective than a large company brings to any problem."

Bonner said PG&E's support of their efforts have helped them grow while meeting the client's goals.

"PG&E has brought us into their program and given us a tremendous opportunity that we might not have had as a small woman-owned company," said Bonner. "We're able to think fast on our feet. We're able to bring innovation in quickly along with new technology. We can come up with better solutions."