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New WKU research center will give students the reins

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com 2 hrs ago

Western Kentucky University students will have more hands-on opportunities to study prevention of workplace accidents, emergencies and health issues with this week's opening of the WKU Center for Environmental and Workplace Health.

Ritchie Taylor, the center's director and an associate professor in WKU's Department of Public Health, said the center stands as a laboratory for students to test their skills. Potential projects could include helping small businesses comply with workplace health standards or collecting samples to test for contaminants, he said.

"We want them to feel that they're competent," he said, noting the center will allow students to work with professionals who will offer career guidance.

The center will have a ribbon-cutting event at 2 p.m. Wednesday at the WKU Center for Research and Development, 2413 Nashville Road.

The ceremony will be hosted by the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce, and WKU President Timothy Caboni will give opening remarks, a news release said.

The new center is the first opened with WKU's College of Health and Human Services, Taylor said. It was made possible by Dean Neale Chumbler and Vijay Golla, the college's associate dean of research and administration, Taylor said.

Taylor also credited Caboni, who has repeatedly described his vision for WKU to be a leading student-center, applied research university.

“His vision’s already led to opportunities such as this,” he said.

Although the center is celebrating its official opening Wednesday, Taylor said it’s already been working with organizations through the region to help improve safety on the job.

“Currently, we’re working with firefighters in the Green River Firefighters Association,” he said.

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The center is trying to find ways to eliminate firefighters' exposure to carcinogens, which are substances that can cause cancer. Initially encountered during fires, Taylor said it's possible firefighters could be inadvertently taking them home to their families through their clothing.

Through the center, Taylor said students will be able to witness the effectiveness of best practices and the broad aspects of the field.

“The whole point here is to allow students to help explore their field,” he said.

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