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Tri-City expert named to new state Academy of Sciences

By Annette Cary, Herald staff writer

The founding class of the Washington State Academy of Sciences includes Subhash Singhal, an expert in fuel cells at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland.

Tonight the inaugural class of 104 scientists, engineers and other technical experts will be inducted at the Museum of Flight in Seattle.

The Legislature authorized the state academy in 2005 to provide objective, expert counsel to Washington's policy makers.

"We will review available data and current knowledge on complex questions and provide analyses to inform public discussion and decisions," said Gordon Orians, the organization's president, in a statement.

The nonprofit academy will not make policy recommendations, but will provide "the definitive, nonpartisan scientific analysis on which the best decisions can be made," he said.

Topics that may be addressed by study committees could include chronic disease, salmon restoration, prison reform, transportation solutions and economic competitiveness.

The founding class was selected by inviting all Washington residents who are members of the National Academies to join, and 104 accepted the invitation. Singhal was elected to the National Academy of Engineering in 2005.

He's the only member of the state academy from the Mid-Columbia and one of just seven from Eastern Washington. More than half of the initial academy members are University of Washington professors or have other professional ties to UW.

Future members of the academy will be nominated and picked by its members, including Singhal, and will not be required to be restricted to members of the National Academies.

Singhal is a Battelle fellow and fuel cell director at the Department of Energy's national lab in Richland. He has an international reputation for expertise in solid oxide fuel cells and last month received the 2008 Grove Medal for sustained advances in fuel cell technology. He has authored 85 scientific publications, edited 14 books and received 13 patents.

He joined PNNL in 2000 after nearly 30 years leading fuel cell development at Siemens Power Generation, formerly Westinghouse Electric Corp.