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Green Jobs and Blue Skies

Energy efficiency occupations study provides hope for California Bay Area

The “three E’s” of the capital markets (economists, employees and *everyone*) were all quivering over February’s national unemployment rate which increased to 8.1%, translating to over 12.5 *million* individuals looking for jobs. In particular, Californians are uneasy about being one of the top four states in the country with statewide unemployment rates above 10%. In addition to the current load of displaced workers, the stock market’s attack on investments has virtually ensured the expected baby boomer retirement trend will significantly stall and June will see an influx of freshly-minted college graduates, all adding to an already competitive prospective-employee pool. According to National Public Radio’s Senior Business Editor, Marilyn Geewax, “We have no silver linings. At this point, things really look terrible. We’re in... a freefalling labor market.”

The California Community College’s Workforce and Economic Development Centers of Excellence (COE) found a pocket of economic hope in their new environmental scan on Energy Efficiency Occupations. California’s persistent move towards energy efficiency has spurred a rising need around eight energy efficiency occupations that is likely to create thousands of well paying jobs over the next three years, according to the COE report.

The report findings are based on survey responses from over 700 firms that hire energy efficiency workers in 12 counties in the San Francisco Bay Area. The firms were primarily from three industries: 1) public or private utilities or agencies, 2) building design and construction, and 3) building or facility operations and maintenance. Industry partner Charles Segerstrom, manager of PG&E’s Energy Centers said, “Increasing focus on climate change mitigation, local jobs, energy costs, legislative requirements and consumer demand for sustainability have all led to a major push for a greener economy. The latest COE report is a major step to uncover information about the energy efficiency sector and related occupations that will support development of ‘green collar’ workforce education and training programs.”

Co-author and San Francisco Bay COE Director John Carrese said, “One of our key goals in releasing these types of reports is to make sure that community colleges understand the market needs so that they can adapt and design curriculum to prepare students for high growth occupations.”

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According to the report, the two largest growth occupations over the next 12 months are building performance or retrofitting specialists with an estimated 950 new jobs (an increase of 21%) and energy auditors or home energy raters with an estimated 590 new jobs (an increase of 20%).

The two largest growth occupations over the next three year period are project managers for construction or design work with an estimated 2,850 new jobs (an increase of 27%) and building performance or retrofitting specialists with an estimated 2,690 new jobs (an increase of 58%).

“These numbers show a real opportunity to train individuals into high growth occupations in the Bay Area,” said Executive Director Dan Geiger, U.S. Green Building Council, Northern California Chapter. “Knowing what occupations and skills are most important is a key factor in re-training displaced workers and getting them back to work, which ultimately will help re-energize our economy here in California.”

Some of the report’s most important data details the current challenges for firms in the energy efficiency sector; finding qualified workers tops the list. Training and certification challenges, along with education and salary information from employers, are also covered in the report. Richard Della Valle, statewide initiative director, Northern California Environmental Training Centers said, “We need to make sure that our community colleges are on track with developing the skills that businesses need most in our workforce. The report sites three key areas including 1) ability to communicate with customers, in writing and in person; 2) understanding of local and state energy efficiency requirements and incentives for new and existing buildings; and 3) general understanding of the mechanics and engineering of energy systems, including HVAC, lighting, and renewable energy systems.”

Carrese and his co-author, Greater Silicon Valley COE Director Jennifer Oliver, will be presenting in-depth key findings and analysis at *Laney College’s Energy Efficiency & HVAC Symposium* on March 20, 2009. The event targets instructors, deans and administrators, policymakers, and industry and community advisors to share best practices, challenges, and resources to develop and expand energy efficiency programs. For registration go to <http://laney.peralta.edu/hvacsymposium>. For a free downloadable copy of the COE Energy Efficiency Occupations report, go to www.coeccc.net/energy.