

A green wave of employment could mean 8,000 new Md. jobs by 2015

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Peter Van Buren started out in a white-collar job before he went green collar in 2006.

He spent 25 years as a wine distributor before joining with two architects to form Baltimore's TerraLogos Green Home Services Inc., a home energy auditing firm that identifies energy leaks and ways to fix them.

Van Buren is among a group of people transitioning from white- or blue-collar jobs to what are quickly being labeled by politicians and industry observers as green-collar jobs, or ones that use environmental efforts to stave off global warming.

A report recently released by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE) on meeting Maryland's electricity needs said that the number of green-collar jobs will continue to grow in the state.

The nonprofit group suggested that as many as 8,000 green-collar jobs are on the horizon for Maryland by 2015, as consumers invest in energy efficiency. Another 4,000 jobs would come on line by 2025.

The state has a 2.5 million-person work force, so an additional 12,000 jobs will not have a huge impact, but the new jobs will still be important, said Daraius Irani, director of applied economics at Towson University's RESI.

Mark Foster is president of Baltimore's Second Chance Inc., an architectural salvage company that also trains low-income workers in carpentry and craftsmanship.

"Part of those 8,000 jobs will be the people we're training on how to play a role," he said.

"A lot of people sometimes think of this green wave that's coming as more pie in the sky, but we recognize very clearly that it's going to create more jobs," he said. "It's becoming more practical every day."



Lee Madison (left) and Dawnyah Smithson, employees of Baltimore-based Second Chance Inc., remove a shutter from a Towson office building before the structure is demolished.

The new jobs would be similar to 100 manufacturing plants relocating to Maryland, minus the cost of infrastructure and negative environmental impact of building new facilities, according to the report. But Irani said he is skeptical, considering that any jobs attached to new technology would require infrastructure.

R. Neal Elliott, an industrial program director with the ACEEE and an author of the report, said it takes labor to be energy efficient.

“People think energy efficiency just magically happens, and it doesn’t,” he said. “With energy efficiency, it means going out to people’s homes, people’s businesses, and doing energy assessments, installing new lights.”

Energy costs have grown exponentially in Maryland since the deregulation of the energy industry; Baltimore Gas & Electric Co.’s rates jumped 50 percent in June. Higher prices might spur more consumers to look for ways to conserve energy, which would bring more jobs to the table.

“You save a lot of energy, but there’s a lot of labor involved,” Elliott said. “The jobs and the resources are brought into the marketplace at the rate they’re needed.”

When consumers want to lessen their energy bill, they often think they need to put new heating systems or windows into their homes or switch to alternative energy to become more efficient, but Van Buren, TerraLogos’ director of green energy, said those steps come last.

“Installing solar panels really isn’t the first thing to do,” he said. “If you’re wasting energy like crazy, what difference does it make?”

Instead, TerraLogos recommends sealing leaks. The company does a full inspection for \$495, using a door blower test to depressurize the home and find air leaks, and an infrared scan to find hidden air pathways and missing insulation.

Green-collar jobs are also popping up on college campuses. Mark Stewart, campus sustainability coordinator at the University of Maryland, College Park, said energy conservation efforts have already increased jobs on campus.

“The fact that I have a job and that we hired a new manager and an energy conservation specialist shows that,” he said.

Johns Hopkins University also has a manager of environmental stewardship and a sustainability coordinator.

As the state passes legislation on energy efficiency, Stewart said the university will continue to add jobs.

“Whatever the state sets as goals, translates obviously to the state institutions,” he said.

“We’re about to become the second university system to pledge to go climate neutral. That will mean without a doubt that on the 15 [University System of Maryland] campuses, there will be people on campus managing those efforts.”

On Tuesday, Governor Martin O’Malley announced his support for ambitious legislation to cap greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent by 2020, and 90 percent by 2050.

But steel industry lobbyists said that capping emissions would force people out of jobs, because steel can’t be created without carbon dioxide. Mittal Steel Co.’s Sparrows Point mill employs 2,500 people.

O’Malley argued that reducing carbon-dioxide emissions could help the economy by adding more green-collar jobs to wind and solar power companies.

Beltsville-based SunEdison LLC, the country’s largest solar-energy services provider, hired more than 200 people last year, the majority of them coming from the faltering construction industry.

“We were able to find people who are shifting from other jobs, but as the solar industry gets bigger and bigger, we also will attract new workers to the work force as well,” said Jigar Shah, a company co-founder and the chief strategy officer.

The industry generates seven construction jobs for every megawatt of solar photovoltaic power installed, Shah said. According to the Center for ReSource Conservation, every megawatt of coal-fired energy produced creates one job.

Many of SunEdison’s employees in the state are hands-on; they are trained to respond to technical problems in solar systems or even clean dirty panels.

“They’re jobs that really can’t be outsourced,” Shah said.

The phrase “green-collar jobs” has become a slogan on the presidential campaign trail. Democratic Sen. Hillary Clinton extolled the jobs on a campaign stop at the General Motors transmission plant in White Marsh, and Sen. Barack Obama announced he would spend \$150 million to create 5 million green-collar jobs. Both said the jobs would create an opportunity to pull people out of poverty.

Annapolis Mayor Ellen Moyer returned from the November U.S. Conference of Mayors Climate Protection Summit in Seattle with some ideas on how environmentally friendly jobs would benefit the city.

“They talked a lot about green-collar jobs and one of the things she brought back was that if you can take people and train them for real-world jobs, not just minimum-wage jobs, and teach them to do green jobs, it would be a great thing for the city,” said the mayor’s spokesman, Ray Weaver.

Training often takes government funding, something SunEdison's Shah said would be essential.

"I do think these are jobs that people can be retrained to do, but it's really a policy question," Shah said. "There's a lot of policy dollars being directed to the industry. It's really just spreading those programs all over the country."

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