

Labor Dep't: Americans Hold 3.1M Green Jobs

Sam Hananel, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — At least 3.1 million Americans are employed in green jobs, a sector that now accounts for about 2.4 percent of the nation's total employment, the Labor Department said Thursday.

The report represents the first time the department's Bureau of Labor Statistics has come up with an official count of environmentally friendly jobs, an emerging part of the economy and a centerpiece of President Barack Obama's stimulus plan.

Environmental groups cheered the report as an affirmation that green jobs are real factor in the nation's economic growth. Obama has set a goal of creating 5 million green jobs and his stimulus plan provided \$80 billion to help boost this sector.

"Critics and politically driven naysayers have been trying to convince us that clean energy and green economy jobs are a hoax," said Bob Keefe, spokesman for the Natural Resources Defense Council. He said the sector would continue to grow "as long as we don't let entrenched interests stop it."

Republicans have questioned Obama's focus, saying there has been little to show for all the money spent. They point to boondoggles like the administration's decision to pump \$528 million into California solar company Solyndra before it collapsed, laying off 1,100 workers.

The report makes no assessment of when the jobs were created and says its figures are from 2010. It found 2.3 million green jobs in the private sector and 860,300 in the public sector.

In the private sector, manufacturing had the greatest number of green jobs with about 461,800, about 4 percent of all manufacturing employment. Construction was second, with about 372,000 jobs.

Vermont had the highest proportion of green employment at 4.4 percent, while Florida had the lowest at 1.3 percent. California had the largest number of green jobs, with 338,000 workers.

To make the count, the BLS developed a two-part definition of green jobs in 2010. The first part counts "output-based jobs" that produce goods and services benefiting the environment or conserving natural resources. That includes a company producing solar panels or a farmer growing organic tomatoes.

The second part of the definition covers "process-based jobs" where workers make a company more environmentally friendly or use fewer natural resources. That would include an employee at a manufacturing plant in charge of recycling, even if the plant itself is not green.

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The report released Thursday includes only jobs under the first part of the definition. A second report counting process-based green jobs will be released later this year.

Coming up with an accurate count of green jobs was tricky because not every step of producing and delivering a green product is environmentally friendly.

Rick Clayton, chief of the division of administrative statistics and labor turnover at BLS, used the example of an organic tomato, which has an environmental benefit where it's grown. But the process of being canned and then delivered by truck to a restaurant has no benefit to the environment, he said.

"To think that we could track an organic tomato would make the definition too broad and it would be uncollectible," Clayton said.

The BLS surveyed 333 industries out of 1,193, and excluded those industries that have no primary environmental benefit, Clayton said.

Clayton said the BLS report is consistent with a 2010 report from the Commerce Department which came up with its own definition to find the number of green jobs in the private sector ranged from about 1.8 million to 2.4 million.

Obama's Council of Economic Advisers has claimed that about 225,000 green jobs were saved or created through the first nine months of 2010. That that figure is not verifiable in the latest report.

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