

## Women and “Green” Jobs

by Alicia Abercrombie

Madison, WI (Nov. 5, 2009) Securing a high paying job in Wisconsin does not necessarily require a four-year college degree. As the “Green Economy” continues to grow, companies need skilled laborers trained at one- and two-year colleges, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. These companies hope that many of their new employees will be women.

Green jobs have risen at a rate nearly two and a half times higher than other jobs in Wisconsin. Some jobs include new technology, but most are in Wisconsin’s staple industries, such as manufacturing and agriculture, and pay as well as jobs that require a four-year degree.

Green jobs seek to reduce carbon emissions, improve the environment, and create and use energy more efficiently. They can come from all sectors of business, and are part of normal full-time jobs. Because a large amount of Wisconsin industry stems from manufacturing and construction green jobs in the state are focused in those areas.

In an economy where most households have two working parents, high-paying job opportunities are becoming increasingly important. Yet most women in Wisconsin don’t know or understand what opportunities are available for them in green industries .

The Wisconsin Women’s Council, a state commissioned panel that examines the role of gender in Wisconsin, hosted a conference titled “Women, Jobs, and Wisconsin’s Green Economy” on October 29, 2009 to develop strategies to include the other half of the workforce in the new section of the economy.

“We’re at this cusp in our country, never before has there been this focus on the green economy and green jobs and energy efficiency,” said Secretary Roberta Gassman, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. “We need to come up with the strategies, the suggestions, the innovations that are going to help women be a part of this. Its good for women, for their kids, for families, for communities, and its good for Wisconsin.”

State agencies weren’t the only ones to attend the conference. Representatives from Madison Area Technical College and Alverno College, as well as solar, landscaping, and energy companies had a strong presence.

According to Susan Rees, director of Wider Opportunities for Women, the Federal Recovery Act will create 770,000 jobs in construction alone. Women only account for around three percent of these non-office construction jobs. The numbers are similar for other jobs, many of which only require a one- or two- year degree.

Part of the reason for why so few women are in the workforce stems from common stereotypes and misconceptions.

“We don’t have 50 percent of the women in the workforce, and I think one of the major problems is institutional,” said Michael Bernhard, master electrician at Full Spectrum Solar LLC and Seventh Generation Energy Solutions. “We have to start changing attitudes by middle school. The whole idea that ‘women don’t get dirty, women don’t do high tech jobs, women don’t do this, women don’t do that,’ is nonsense, but it’s a societal norm.”

Because of these norms, women who decide to pursue careers in trade jobs sometimes feel they aren’t accepted by the men they work with. Many of the women in training programs now are switching jobs because they don’t want to feel like an outsider, said Carrie Hersh, Operations Manager for WRTP/BIG STEP. WRTP works to develop family-sustaining jobs in the Milwaukee area.

Many technical colleges have created training programs for green jobs. MATC now has the Tools for Tomorrow: Women in Trades & Technology Program. Alverno College also works to train women in non-traditional jobs.

State programs have also been put in place, many building on recent stimulus dollars. Both the Wisconsin Department of Energy and the Department of Labor recently allocated funds for training youth, women, minorities and low-income workers in skills needed for green jobs.

Participants at the conference agreed that just having the programs is not enough. Women must be informed of these opportunities, both in high school and beyond. Programs are needed that will allow women to learn new skills. New policies must also be put in place at both the state and national levels.

A report from the conference will be presented to the U.S. Department of Labor in the coming weeks, as well as being made available to the public. For more information on any of these issues, as well as handouts and photos from the conference, contact Christine Lidbury, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Women’s Council at (608) 266-2219 or visit their web site at [www.womenscouncil.wi.gov](http://www.womenscouncil.wi.gov)

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