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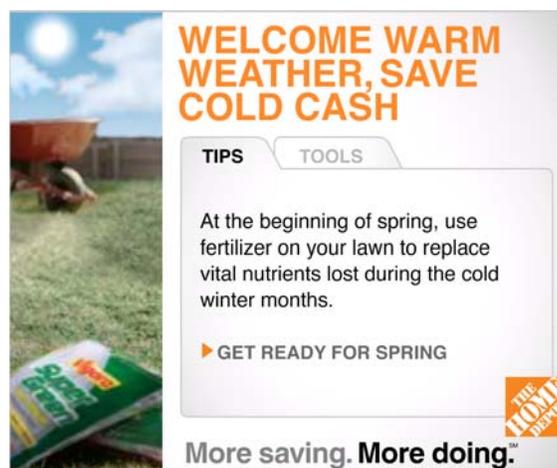
Green jobs: Federal mandates could fuel local employment growth

Federal stimulus cash, new state laws target energy efficiency

By Jennifer Slosar

Special to the Tribune

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The employment picture in the U.S. may seem bleak, but the billions of dollars in federal stimulus money geared toward energy efficiency provides more than a glimmer of hope in the green jobs sector.

The green-collar economy offers something for all skill levels, from high-tech engineers to entry-level caulkers and insulators, local employment experts said.

And more good news:

"There are new state regulations requiring energy efficiency and renewable energy sourcing from state utilities," said Jack Darin, director of the Sierra Club's Illinois chapter. "That means the energy efficiency industry will see long-term growth beyond the stimulus bump."

Also helping is federal legislation that has made millions of dollars available for jobs training. Community-based organizations like workforce development agency OAI and the Local Economic and Employment Development Council also are ramping up to help people of limited education and those with a history of incarceration.

Over the next two months, government agencies and non-profits will try to determine how the state's green recovery funding—estimated by the Center for American Progress to total \$4.3 billion—will be distributed. Experts say a significant chunk of that money will go to weatherize and retrofit homes and buildings to make them more energy efficient.

"There are significant opportunities for low-skilled entry-level workers who haven't worked construction before but could learn how to blow in insulation or replace old windows with a relatively short training program," said Jennifer Keeling of the Chicago Jobs Council.

Analysts agree that the energy services industry will have to respond to an unprecedented demand for skilled and certified energy auditors. These workers, who include energy raters, identify leaky ducts and inadequate insulation and recommend improvements for heating and cooling systems.

The Illinois Association of Energy Raters Web site lists only 24 home energy raters that are certified through national standards.

Because there is a lack of training centers in Illinois, Cheryl Pomeroy, a partner in the energy guidance company eZing Inc., recommends that people interested in the field seek an apprenticeship with an energy rating company.

After leaving a career as a union carpenter and contractor in her 50s, Pomeroy worked part time for an energy rating company before co-founding her own business two months ago. "It requires analytic skills, people skills and physical skills," Pomeroy said. "It also helps if you have experience in the building trades, and if you don't mind getting dirty crawling around attics and crawl spaces."

With a diverse manufacturing base that can be retooled for green production, Chicago is poised to be a significant parts supplier and headquarters hub for renewables like wind, solar, geothermal and biomass industries, experts say.

The long-term prospects in Chicago's wind industry are good, said William Haas of Shaw Environmental and Infrastructure, a consultant to the national trade organization the American Wind Energy Association. "Regulations requiring Illinois utilities to source a percentage of their energy from wind by 2025 and new production tax credits will counteract the credit crunch that has temporarily slowed the industry," Haas said.

"These are areas for strategic investment and long-term growth," said Demetria Giannisis, president and chief executive officer of the Chicago Manufacturing Center. "And the city's level of engagement with its climate action plan is also long-term, so I think that the prospects will keep getting better."

Giannisis said professionals in a diverse array of fields, including engineering, technology sales, project management and manufacturing procurement, should be looking at how to tap into the renewable energy sector.

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