

Business, Finance & Technology

ECONOMY; Green jobs must pay good wages, labor and enviro groups say

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Labor and environmental groups say the government should ensure that "green" jobs in the alternative energy sector -- a major goal of the economic stimulus bill before Congress -- pay good wages.

There is currently a wide range of wages and conditions for jobs in fields such as manufacturing renewable energy components and recycling, a report today warns.

"Until now, discussions of green jobs have largely assumed that these will be good, middle-class jobs," says the report by the group **Good Jobs First**, which was commissioned by the Sierra Club, a union coalition called Change to Win, the Laborers International Union of North America and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

But such assumptions are not always correct, they say.

"While advocates may aspire to make every green job a good one, our examination of some existing workplaces in several environment-friendly sectors of the economy -- including manufacturing of components for wind and solar energy, green construction and recycling -- shows a wide variation in labor conditions," the report states.

The report finds wages as low as \$8.25 per hour at a recycling plant. It also finds that manufacturers of renewable-energy components are paying as low as \$11 per hour and wage rates at many wind- and solar-equipment factories are well below the national average for manufacturing.

It notes that there is a wide variation in wages, with some much higher, and also finds that better wages are often tied to programs that link wage standards to economic development subsidies.

For instance, the average hourly wage at the Sanyo Solar plant in Salem, Ore., is more than \$22 per hour, while the average wage at the Brighton, Colo., plant of Vestas -- a major Danish wind company -- is \$18.36 per hour.

The report also surveys other "green job" sectors, recycling and construction of environmentally friendly and efficient buildings, and weatherization.

The report's policy recommendations include various ways to link government support for "green" industries -- such as subsidies and tax incentives at the federal, state and local level -- to wage standards.

"This dependence of green industries on government aid creates a sterling opportunity to raise employment standards in the clean-energy economy," it states. "The very existence of economic development subsidies is based on the principle that taxpayer funds can justifiably be used to benefit private parties only if the result is job creation and rising living standards."

It also calls for "living wage" rules for government contractors and supports federal "prevailing wage" requirements and other steps. One recommendation calls for adding labor criteria to the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, certification program.

Buy American

The report endorses "buy American" domestic sourcing requirements for federally backed green jobs and renewable energy programs. The House-passed version of the stimulus bill would require building-retrofit and other infrastructure projects that get stimulus funding to use U.S.-made iron and steel.

The Senate version goes further, limiting stimulus infrastructure funding to projects that use U.S.-made iron, steel and manufactured goods. But some U.S. trading partners are attacking the "buy American" effort, and business groups are, as well (E&E Daily, Feb. 2).

The report comes ahead of a major conference and lobbying effort on "green jobs" this week, and as the Senate considers the stimulus bill. The stimulus measures contain more than \$70 billion in alternative energy, energy efficiency and transit funding, other infrastructure investments, and funding for "green jobs" worker training.

The groups are also using the report to push for the Employee Free Choice Act, a labor priority that would make unionizing easier. A major provision requires employers to recognize a union if a majority of employees sign authorization cards supporting unionization.

[Click here to read the green jobs report.](#)

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