

## Better Buildings, More Jobs?

### *How President Obama's Plan to Improve Energy Efficiency Could Affect Latino Workers*

#### Potential Job Opportunities for Latinos in Energy Efficiency

In the face of persistently high unemployment and major budget constraints, policymakers are seeking cost-effective ways to put Americans back to work. As the fastest-growing segment of the American workforce and among those hit hardest by the recession, [Latinos have much at stake](#) in the policy debate on job creation.<sup>1</sup> On February 3, President Obama announced a goal to make commercial buildings 20% more energy efficient by 2020. Through tax incentives, competitive grants, and regulations, the president's [Better Buildings Initiative](#) aims to reduce the nation's energy consumption and create jobs.

Rising demand in the energy efficiency sector could open up employment opportunities for Latinos and other workers in related industries such as construction. The table below shows that a vibrant energy efficiency sector would employ workers of all skills and backgrounds. Today, approximately 390,000 Latinos work in occupations that are needed in energy efficiency. Latinos are overrepresented in three such occupations—refrigeration mechanics and installers, maintenance and repair workers, and insulation workers—and they are underrepresented in most of the other occupations found in energy efficiency. Most notably, accountants and auditors employ the greatest number of Latinos, but Latinos represent only 6.3% of these workers.

Occupations in energy efficiency	Latinos employed, all industries <sup>2</sup> (in thousands)	Latino share of total employed, all industries
<b>Accountants and auditors</b>		
→ Energy auditors	111	6.3%
<b>Refrigeration mechanics and installers</b>		
→ Weatherization installers and technicians	70	18.7%
<b>Maintenance and repair workers</b>	63	15.2%
<b>General and operations managers</b>	60	6.0%
<b>Mechanical engineers</b>	18	5.8%
<b>Electrical engineers</b>		
→ Energy engineers	16	5.1%
<b>Insulation workers (floors, ceilings, and walls)</b>	15	41.5%
<b>Electrical power line installers and repairers</b>	14	10.8%
<b>Stationary engineers and boiler operators</b>	12	12.0%
<b>Financial analysts</b>	6	6.4%
<b>Transportation vehicle, equipment, and systems inspectors</b>	5	9.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>14%</b>

*Note:* Occupations listed in gray are “new and emerging occupations” that share characteristics with existing occupations.<sup>3</sup>

## **Workforce Investments Necessary to Meet National Goals**

Investing in energy efficiency on a national scale will not only increase the number of jobs in existing occupations but also require workers to learn new skills in order to remain competitive. Approximately 90% of Latinos currently employed in the occupations listed above would require skills training and/or additional education in order to transition successfully to energy efficiency jobs. Based on a report commissioned by the U.S. Department of Labor, workers in the following occupations will require “enhanced skills” in order to obtain jobs in energy efficiency:<sup>4</sup>

- Electrical engineers
- Financial analysts
- General and operations managers
- Refrigeration mechanics and installers
- Maintenance and repair workers
- Mechanical engineers
- Transportation vehicle, equipment, and systems inspectors

In order to ensure fair access to new jobs in energy efficiency, workforce development policies must be targeted to address the needs of Latinos and other workers facing barriers to employment. For instance, 18% of Latino youth, 92% of whom are U.S. citizens, are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential.<sup>5</sup> Latino immigrants face acute challenges. Fifty-three percent of Hispanic immigrant workers have completed high school, compared to 84% of native-born Hispanics, 88% of Blacks, and 93% of Whites.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, 73% of Hispanic immigrant adults speak English less than “very well.”

## **Recommendations for Preparing Latino Workers for Jobs in Energy Efficiency**

These data, plus the collective experiences of Latino-serving community-based organizations in training workers for jobs in energy efficiency, have led to the following recommendations:

- Resources for workforce training in energy efficiency should be targeted to programs that serve unemployed or underemployed workers who reside in low-income areas.
- Community-based organizations which deliver curricula that integrate English instruction with basic skills training (known as integrated training) should be required partners in local workforce training initiatives.<sup>7</sup>
- Opportunities for on-the-job training should be available to individuals to accommodate the competing demands of working and learning simultaneously.
- States and localities should make scholarships available for skills training and contractor accreditation courses for pre-qualified workers who demonstrate financial need.

## **Conclusion**

Policy proposals to improve the energy efficiency of America’s commercial buildings hold great promise for Latino workers. However, targeted investments in worker education and training are essential to ensuring that Latino workers can fully contribute to national energy-saving goals.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> In January 2011, Latinos continued to be unemployed at a higher rate than other American workers. Unemployment was 8.0% for Whites, 15.7% for African Americans, and 11.9% for Latinos. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “The Employment Situation – January 2011,” news release, February 4, 2011, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empst.pdf> (accessed February 4, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Occupational employment data count all workers in all industries, not just those in energy efficiency. NCLR analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, “Employed and experienced unemployed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity,” 2009 Annual Averages, *Current Population Survey*. Washington, DC, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Occupation codes are based on Erich C. Dierrdorff et al. *Greening of the World of Work: Implications for O\*NET-SOC and New and Emerging Occupations* (Raleigh, NC: National Center for O\*NET Development, prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor, 2009), <http://www.onetcenter.org/reports/Green.html> (accessed June 1, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education 2010*. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Current Population Survey*, 2009 Annual Averages. Washington, DC, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> For more information about integrated training, see Elizabeth Moore and Emma Oppenheim, *Learning in Context: Preparing Latino Workers for Careers and Continuing Education* (Washington, DC: National Council of La Raza, 2010),

[http://www.nclr.org/index.php/publications/preparing\\_latino\\_workers\\_for\\_careers\\_and\\_continuing\\_education/](http://www.nclr.org/index.php/publications/preparing_latino_workers_for_careers_and_continuing_education/) (accessed February 3, 2011).