

...Renewable energy generating jobs

(From Page 1)

Photo-Voltaic Energy Generation Systems that begins in January had just one spot remaining as of press time.

Solar industry demand for silicon chips surpassed the demand from computer makers.

"The market is increasing, and we want to capture as much of it as we can," said the training center's solar specialist, Brian Crise, who helped revise the Solar Photovoltaic Systems chapter of the National Electrical Code.

IBEW's market share in residential solar installation is pretty small. But several well-known union commercial-industrial contractors now have solar divisions and a growing business, including EC Company and Dynalectric.

Solar installation employs electricians, but there are also jobs on the manufacturing side, like the workers at the Solarworld AG facility in Vancouver, Wash., who are represented by the Machinists Union. In February, Solarworld bought the former Komatsu silicon chip plant in Hillsboro, and announced plans to invest \$400 million to remake it as a solar silicon wafer and solar cell production facility. When it reaches full capacity by 2009, the German-owned plant is expected to be the largest solar factory in North America, with around 1,000 workers.

And California-headquartered So-laicx, a manufacturer of silicon ingots and wafers used in the solar energy in-

dustry, announced in June that it will be locating a solar chip factory in Portland's Rivergate Industrial District, employing around 100 workers.

Meanwhile, other skilled trades are reaping the wind. Wind turbines aren't manufactured locally (yet), but Danish turbine maker Vestas employs

about 200 people at its North American headquarters in Portland. Ships bearing Vestas wind turbines made in Europe and towers made in Vietnam are being unloaded by union longshore workers at the Port of Vancouver using a special \$23 million crane installed for that purpose. The windmill components head up I-84 aboard Wilhelm Trucking and Rigging trucks driven by members of Teamsters Local 162. Then union Iron Workers, Operating Engineers Laborers and Electricians install them.

The Columbia Gorge east of the Cascades is fast becoming a giant wind farm, with 438 megawatts of currently-installed peak capacity from wind turbines, 919 megawatts approved for construction within the next year or so, and 1,847 megawatts more under review. [As it's commonly described, a megawatt is enough electricity to power 1,000 homes; wind turbines typically operate at about a third of peak capacity, because the wind doesn't always blow at top speed.]

D.H. Blattner & Sons, the general contractor on the wind farms, started out open shop on the Stateline Wind Project, but unions worked to build a relationship, and now the company signs project labor agreements pledging to use all-union crews.

Blattner is currently overseeing the construction of two wind farms — PGE's 450 megawatt Biglow Canyon and the 285 megawatt Klondike III; both are in Sherman County. Also in the works are the Leaning Juniper II wind farm in Gilliam County (279 megawatts) and an expansion of the Stateline farm in Umatilla County. Four more wind farms — in Wasco Sherman, Gilliam, and Morrow counties — are at earlier stages in site review process.

That pace is likely to continue under another new law approved by the Oregon Legislature this year — it requires the state's investor owned utilities (PGE and Pacificorp) to get 25 percent of the electricity they sell in Oregon from new renewable sources by 2025.

Then there's biomass, a catchall term — basically organic material which is burned to create energy. That can mean cowpies — like methane digesters on a feedlot or dairy farm — or it can mean wood products.

Denny Scott, assistant director of the Carpenters Industrial Council, said

The market is increasing, and we want to capture as much of it as we can!

his union has been calling on the U.S. Forest Service to award long-term stewardship contracts to thin overcrowded forests — to reduce catastrophic forest fires and provide biomass fuel. Currently several mills use sawdust or woodchips to generate energy for consumption in the mill, turning a waste product into a renewable fuel source. To expand, Scott said, companies would need to know they would have a steady supply of new material.

Another underexploited source of energy is geothermal: Oregon is geologically active, with hot springs and volcanic activity under the surface, particularly in the central part of the state. In Klamath Falls, with the help of federal money, the Oregon Institute of Technology is planning to drill a mile-deep geothermal well and use the steam to generate about one megawatt of electricity, enough to power the campus.

The final frontier, perhaps, is wave energy from Oregon's 300-mile coastline. Several technologies are being tested. Oregon Iron Works in Clackamas, which employs members of Iron Workers Shopmen Local 516, has signed contracts with New Jersey-based Ocean Power Technology and



the Canadian company Finavera Renewables to build prototype wave energy buoys. And in April, Australian-headquartered Oceanlinx Limited announced plans to build a "wave park" one to three miles off the Oregon coast near Florence. At least 10 floating wave energy buoys would be anchored to the seabed, generating up to 15 megawatts, with the potential for more to be added.

Taken together, says Shimshak of Renewable Energy Northwest, the region's new renewables could supply the region's energy needs, and supply energy-hungry California as well.

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