

Utility companies can increase California's energy savings by boosting workforce training, report says

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Credit: Lu-jah Ivanova from Pexels

California's investor-owned utilities, the companies that supply about 75 percent of state residents with gas and electricity, need to strengthen certification requirements for contractors and their workers if the state's energy-efficiency programs are going to pay real dividends for Californians trying to reduce energy consumption, according to a new report by University of California, Berkeley, researchers.

The utilities were directed by the California Public Utilities Commission to hire experts to evaluate their workforce development efforts aimed at making sure California meets its energy-efficiency targets, and they selected UC Berkeley's Donald Vial Center on Employment in the Green Economy to examine the issue.

"Energy-efficiency jobs in the near future will require additional knowledge, skills and abilities to complete this more complex work than were required for past (energy-efficiency) success," says the Vial Center report.

"The contractor and worker standards that we are recommending will help ensure that new energy-efficiency systems are properly installed, retrofitted, operated and maintained in California, and will give consumers more confidence to invest in energy efficiency," said UC Berkeley labor specialist Carol Zabin, lead author of the study and chair of the Vial Center as well as of the California Green Collar Jobs Council.

The utilities, such as Pacific Gas & Electric Co. and Southern California Edison, administer most of the state's energy-efficiency incentive programs, which are intended to encourage the adoption of upgraded heating-ventilation and air conditioning systems, solar and advanced lighting installations and other energy-saving measures. The programs are financed by ratepayers to the tune of more than \$1 billion a year. About \$30 million of that amount is now spent on worker training and

education.

Requiring skills certifications also sends a signal to California's training institutions—from community colleges and trade apprenticeships to university programs—about the need to refresh their curricula in order to teach the latest skills in all jobs that impact energy use, said Zabin. The jobs held by those who work with energy-efficiency systems is diverse and includes everyone from electricians to engineers, she said.

The complete report, "Workforce Issues and Energy Efficiency Programs: A Plan for California's Utilities," has been presented to the CPUC, the utilities and other stakeholders. It can be found [online](#).

Zabin said that besides helping the environment and saving ratepayers money, [energy-efficiency](#) programs can help boost the economy and open the door to living-wage jobs and new careers for currently unskilled or low-skill workers.

"California has made a clear commitment to expand economic opportunity for low-income Californians as it transitions to a clean economy," said Cecilia Estolano, report co-author, an expert in sustainable economic development and a partner at Estolano LeSar Perez Advisors, an economic and workforce development consulting firm.

"We believe our report provides a specific and feasible roadmap that the utilities and the CPUC can use to help this happen."

More information: The complete report, "Workforce Issues and Energy Efficiency Programs: A Plan for California's Utilities," is available online: irle.berkeley.edu/vial/publications/energy-programs14.html

Provided by University of California - Berkeley

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