

# Study says California solar boom makes the state a national leader, prepares new generation of workers

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Research from UC Berkeley shows that more than 15,000 new jobs have been created over the last five years by California's solar-farm construction boom.

Strong statewide and federal clean-energy policies have positioned California as the nation's solar energy leader in terms of generating new, well-paying construction and permanent jobs while working to curb climate change, according to a new report by UC Berkeley.

The Donald Vial Center on Employment in the Green Economy at

Berkeley found that California's use of electricity from renewable sources increased from 11 percent in 2008 to nearly 20 percent in 2013. The center's report, "Environmental and Economic Benefits of Building Solar in California," released today (Monday, Nov. 10), notes that more than 15,000 new jobs have been created over the last five years by California's solar-farm construction boom, with workers building [solar arrays](#) earning on average \$78,000 a year plus health and other benefits.

"When we combine high-road construction practices like union apprenticeship with smart environmental policies and green technologies, we can tackle climate change and grow a [clean energy](#) economy that sustains working families," said John O'Rourke, 9th District International vice president of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

The Sierra Club and the IBEW are holding a press event at 9:30 a.m. today (Monday, Nov. 10) at the IBEW-NECA Zero Net Energy Center to discuss how these smart national and statewide clean energy policies have led to this incredible job growth. An advisor from the White House and this report's author will attend.

"California has made addressing climate disruption a priority, which has led to a thriving clean energy economy and the creation thousands of new, exciting, and meaningful opportunities for our workforce. This report is proof of that success and an example of how protecting our health and environment creates jobs and boosts the economy," said Michael Brune, executive director of the Sierra Club.

"However," he said, "we are only scratching the surface of our clean energy potential and with it incredible job growth. California must continue to push for more clean energy generation and inspire the rest of the nation to follow."

The jobs include 10,000 construction jobs building utility-scale solar facilities, which are essentially big solar farms that generate electricity and supply it to the energy grid. They are often located in less-populous areas, as opposed to small-scale solar arrays in cities or solar panels installed on rooftops. For several projects, labor and environmental groups, like the IBEW and Sierra Club, have worked together to ensure projects are built in an environmentally-responsible way that avoids harmful impacts to sensitive habitat and creates good-quality jobs.

Other solar jobs involve operating and maintaining the utility-scale plants, which have lifespans of roughly 25 years, and pay about \$69,000 a year, and include new jobs created up and down the solar supply chain.

Recently installed solar farms account for about 75 percent of California's newly installed, solar power-generated electricity.

"In California, the construction jobs created by the utility-scale solar boom have been good jobs paying decent wages, providing good benefits, and creating upward-mobility career ladders for blue-collar construction workers," says study author and UC Berkeley visiting scholar Peter Philips, a professor of economics at the University of Utah and an authority on the country's construction labor market.

"However," says Philips, "in states without policies and practices that bend construction work towards high-skilled careers, solar projects often obtain workers from temporary labor agencies. Most of these workers earn low wages with limited benefits and they have little access to training or career advancement."

The report recommends four key policy actions to build on California's leadership in this area. They include:

- Renewing the federal Investment Tax Credit at 30 percent after

its current expiration date of December 2016;

- Expanding California's statewide renewable energy mandate beyond its current goal of 33 percent;
- Protecting Assembly Bill 32, the state's landmark [climate change](#) legislation, from implementation delays or weakening; and
- Promoting collective bargaining and joint labor-management apprenticeship programs on energy projects during construction, operation and maintenance.

**More information:** The complete report is available online:  
[laborcenter.berkeley.edu/envir ... reers-cleaner-lives/](http://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/envir...reers-cleaner-lives/)

Provided by University of California - Berkeley

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