

Solar jobs are up in Minnesota, but down nationally

February 14 2019, by Mike Hughlett



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Minnesota posted an eight percent increase in solar industry jobs last year, bucking a national solar employment decline of 3.2 percent, said an annual report released Tuesday by The Solar Foundation.

The state tallied 4,602 solar [jobs](#) last year, up from 4,256 in 2017 and 1,995 in 2015. Minnesota ranked 15th in the nation in 2018 in total solar jobs, according to The Solar Foundation, a non-profit research group.

As defined by the foundation, solar employment includes developing, constructing and maintaining solar arrays, along with manufacturing, sales and distribution jobs connected to the solar industry. About two-thirds of solar jobs nationally are in installation and project development.

The U.S. solar industry employed 242,343 people as of 2018, down by nearly 8,000 jobs from 2017 and the second consecutive year of decline after years of steady growth.

Solar companies delayed many large projects in late 2017, waiting for the outcome of a petition for new tariffs on [solar panels](#), according to the Solar Foundation. The delays put a damper on growth, reducing employment demand.

Solar installer is expected to be the fastest-growing occupation in the United States from 2016 to 2026, followed closely by wind turbine technician, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The former had a 2017 median annual pay of \$39,490; the latter, \$53,880.

While [solar energy](#) still makes up only about 1 percent of Minnesota's power generation, it has grown from virtually nothing: 1 megawatt of production capacity in 2008 to a projected 882 megawatts by the end of 2018, according to the Minnesota Department of Commerce. (A megawatt is one million watts).

The state's community solar garden program has particularly bloomed over the past two years, comprising around 60 percent of solar power capacity in Minnesota.

The solar garden program, created by the state Legislature in 2013, is aimed at residents, businesses and governments that want solar energy without setting up their own panels. Independent developers build the [solar arrays](#) and Minneapolis-based Xcel Energy buys power and administers the program.

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