

High-tech employment shrinks in second quarter, despite positive signs on unemployment rates

26 July 2004

The number of employed computer professionals dropped from the first to second quarters, according to data compiled by the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). At the same time, high-tech unemployment rates **also fell**.

BLS reported a decline of 131,000 employed computer software engineers in the second quarter vs. the first quarter (725,000 vs. 856,000). Employed computer scientists and systems analysts have fallen 51,000 (621,000 vs. 672,000) during the same period, while computer hardware engineers dropped 3,000 (83,000 vs. 86,000). Computer programmers experienced a fall of 16,000 (575,000 vs. 591,000).

Bucking the trend, the number of employed electrical and electronics engineers (EEs) rose by 24,000 from the first to second quarters (351,000 vs. 327,000). The increase, however, is still below the 363,000 quarterly average in 2003.

"The EE employment figure is encouraging, and we're interested to see if the trend continues," IEEE-USA President John Steadman said. "But we're most concerned with our shrinking high-tech workforce, much of which is attributable to the offshoring of high-tech jobs."

BLS reported the EE unemployment rate, which stood at 5.3 percent in the first quarter, was 0.8 percent in the second quarter. While the increase in EE employment would indicate a falling unemployment rate, sampling errors could account for the substantial quarterly decrease, according to statistical consultant Richard Ellis of Ellis Research Services. A rate for computer hardware engineers wasn't reported because no one in this job classification among the survey population claimed to be unemployed last quarter.

The unemployment rate for computer software engineers fell from 3.3 percent in the first quarter to 2.9 percent in the second. For computer scientists and system analysts, the rate went from 6.7 percent to 4.0 percent; for computer programmers it fell from 9.5 percent to 5.7 percent.

"Sadly, part of the unemployment improvements might be because some technical professionals have become discouraged and are leaving the field," Steadman said.

Source: [IEEE-USA](#)

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