



Recruiters & Industry

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Job creation and environmental protection

The US debate about environmental protection often assumes that saving natural resources means losing jobs. So we conducted a series of studies to see whether that was true.

Our survey of the environmental-protection employment climate led to the opposite conclusion. It also showed that the sector is larger than previously thought, and extends beyond even traditionally scientific jobs.

We found that the US environmental-protection workforce encompassed some 5.1 million jobs in 2004, employing more workers than the pharmaceutical and chemical industries. The majority of those are not in conventional environmental activities, but are standard jobs for accountants, engineers, computer analysts and other workers.

That doesn't mean that environmental protection doesn't need scientists, just that the workforce is very varied. Our survey showed 55,000 jobs for electricians, 5,000 more than for environmental engineers with graduate degrees, and 31,000 for accountants and auditors, more than twice as many as for geoscientists with advanced degrees.

The breadth of non-scientific professional jobs indicates a need for more education. Subjects such as environmental science and engineering, ecology, chemistry and biology are obviously valuable for all professions in the area — not just scientists. But the industry is creating as many, or more, jobs for people with training at all levels in fields such as computer systems, finance, accounting, electrical engineering and management. Most jobs in this field do not require specialized training in narrow environmental disciplines.

Finally, at US state level, the relationship between environmental policies and economic/job growth is positive. Environmental jobs are concentrated in a number of sectors including manufacturing and professional, scientific and technical services. All states are seeking to expand their high-tech industrial and manufacturing bases, and environmental protection offers a means of doing this. Investments in this area will create numerous jobs for skilled, well-paid, technical workers, many with advanced degrees, many of them in the manufacturing sector. These are the kinds of jobs that states seek to attract and that provide the foundation for entrepreneurship and economic growth.