

UNEMPLOYED TURN TO NATURAL GAS INDUSTRY FOR JOBS



The natural gas industry in the United States, much like the solar industry, is thriving for the most part. This has plenty of unemployed citizens of the country turning to this industry for jobs. The natural gas industry is using practices that are not environmentally friendly by fracking the Marcellus and Utica shales located underground. The states doing this include New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia. "There's really been a sea change in these opportunities, a cornucopia of community colleges and local workforce training programs across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, even the southern tier of New York," said Travis Windle, who is a spokesman for the Marcellus Shale Coalition. "As natural gas continues to expand, so do the needs for a local workforce with these skills that are going to be in need for the next 50 years, or even more." Many of the jobs offered in the natural gas industry can produce salaries of \$60,000 or more per year, which is causing people to find jobs no matter what the job entails when it comes to the environment. A three year, \$4.9 million grant from the United States Department of Labor issued to five community colleges in New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia has allowed the colleges to form a coalition known as ShaleNET. The coalition has a goal of training and placing new employees in high-priority jobs throughout the natural gas industry. "We're fortunate that in a lot of these cases these programs are full and with waiting lists," said Jeff Lorson, who is the director of the shale-related jobs center at Penn College of Technology, which is a member of ShaleNET. "For the most part, we've got really good opportunities for people in the credit programs. We've got good enrollment, I'll say that." Professor Samuel Ameri, the chair of Petroleum and Natural Gas Engineering Department at West Virginia University, had the following to say: "The growth has been such that we are actively in search of two professors," said Ameri. "We are drawing students from every corner of the world." Ameri also claims that enrollment in the school's program has increased over the past couple of years. During the 2004-2005 school year there were only 74 students in the program and now there are 242 students in the program this year. "There is some danger in young people getting trained in the area, when maybe five or ten years from now other factors will keep them from taking advantage of it any further," said Chuck Wyrostock, who is an outreach organizer for the Sierra Club of West Virginia's natural gas campaign. A possible push for alternative energy could cause the country to stop relying on fossil fuels in the near future. Experts believe that the natural gas industry will still be strong for the next 30 to 50 years but those working in the industry will need to move to keep their jobs as some of the workers will need to follow the oil rigs around the country and the world.