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## Careers in new energy

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by Duane Craig

### SPECIAL SECTION: Health & Science Career Advice

New energy careers generally refer to jobs in solar power, wind power, geothermal power, tidal wave power and hydrogen and fuel cell technologies. New energy may even include nuclear energy since that technology is evolving once again. There are also many jobs in government, trade associations and supporting industries such as software. That means that for anyone with the right education, skills and abilities, this is a wide area of career opportunities.

“You can’t go wrong with a job in the new energy field,” said **Andrew Matthy**, business development manager/senior recruiter with TrueBridge Resources, a company that places people in the new energy sector. “There will be continued career growth in this industry for the foreseeable future given the ongoing push across the country for ‘greener’ technologies and state-mandated renewable energy quotas.”

New energy is challenged in a few areas, though. Scott Cook, vice president for Day & Zimmerman, custom outsourcers to the power, process and industrial markets, cautioned that many companies in the traditional power sector are taking a wait-and-see approach on moving into new energy and haven’t freed up the funding yet to move more quickly. He also said the numbers of jobs in the long term might not be as high as those for traditional energy. He cited the example of a nuclear power plant construction requiring tens of thousands of people, whereas a new energy wind farm would require only hundreds.

Similarly, new energy’s growth is often incentive-driven and dependent upon state and municipal government incentives such as grants and tax breaks. Therefore, the job opportunities are going to vary according to the times and the locale.

Sumit Bhatnagar, managing partner for Green Brilliance, a solar power manufacturer, distributor and installer headquartered in Herndon, Va., said the existence of incentives is a strong motivator to people who want to install solar systems.

However, career opportunities will not be limited to companies that create and install new energy systems. For example, **Jill McKay**, account manager with TrueBridge Resources, said one in-demand opportunity lies in public policy.

“All of the major players in the power/energy sector have offices in Washington that focus on policy, public affairs, government oversight, etc.,” McKay said. “Qualifications for these positions include a Masters in Business or a related discipline.” She said the required skill sets will vary depending upon where a person wants to enter the new energy sector, but a Master of Science or Master of Business Administration is always preferred, with aerospace engineering, electrical engineering and a solid understanding of transmission strategy and public policy also being sought by hiring firms. She said government funding for new clean technology and Smart Grid projects is estimated to directly create 280,000 new jobs between 2009 and 2012.

For those job seekers who want to move from traditional energy to new energy, Cook said project management skills are in demand. He described these job candidates as people who don’t have just the technical abilities but also the ability to manage people and projects as well.

“They need people who can go in and adapt to multiple changing conditions,” Cook said. “Even in the traditional energy business it’s difficult to find enough qualified project managers.” He also said that people who have strong analytical skills that can be used to mine data, interpret it and to tell the stories around it are in demand for project control roles. Those with quality assurance and quality control backgrounds will continue to be needed, as will those who are Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified.

Bhatnagar said his particular challenge is finding very analytical engineers who can create custom solar power systems, and on the front end of his business, finding sales people with technical backgrounds they can use to guide the customers to the best solutions. Those with strong technical backgrounds in electrical engineering, civil engineering, electrical, and those with strong analytical skills make good candidates for transitioning to new energy from other fields. He noted, however, that many jobs such as administrative roles don’t require deep knowledge of the technical aspects of new energy and are easily filled.

Perhaps the best success in new energy may also hinge on the person having a passion for environmental affairs.

“When people know they are making a social and global impact through their work, they tend to be more passionate about the job,” said Roderick Morris, SVP, consumer marketing and operations at OPOWER, an energy efficiency and Smart Grid software company. “Like many in our industry, we operate in a very fast-paced environment. The software engineers, sales people and everyone else we hire embrace and thrive at that fast pace because they share a drive for making a positive impact through energy efficiency.”

*This special section was written by Duane Craig in conjunction with The Washington Post Custom Content department.*