

Creating a Green Career Pipeline



The state and the country more broadly are currently facing two major, related energy challenges. First, New Jersey is already seeing the impacts of a warming planet, driven by fossil fuel emissions, such as persistent drought, wildfires, tornados, unprecedented flash flooding, and extreme heat. Each climate related event is a reminder of the reality that we must work together on solutions that reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and transition us to a cleaner and greener future. The second challenge is a need to generate significantly more energy to keep up with increasing demands. Some of this increasing need is the result of recent solutions to the first problem, which have focused on the decarbonization of the transportation and residential sectors. As a result of these positive policies combined with the rise of artificial intelligence, at this point in time, we are both producing too many greenhouse gas emissions and not enough energy to power the future.

While our power grid is much cleaner today than it was a decade ago, the projected skyrocketing need for energy driven by increased electrification in the buildings sector, a growing electric vehicle market share, and artificial intelligence, means we are going to have to bring more power onto the grid. This need leaves us with two options - go backwards and restart or expand fossil fuel plants OR to invest and grow clean energy production to meet demand. Both these paths will create more energy, but choosing option one means ignoring climate and health impacts, increasing our reliance on foreign sources of fuel, and creating very few new jobs. By contrast, deploying clean energy to meet our needs will help us to continue to lower our emissions, power our country with purely American energy, and create thousands of building, manufacturing, and supply chain jobs, many in areas that desperately need economic development. The choice is obvious.

Choosing to develop and deploy clean energy means we will need thousands of new workers in our state who are trained and ready to work in these relatively new industries. Taking steps to develop this workforce who can step into these roles is critical to success. These careers will be able to sustain families and create direct and indirect economic benefits throughout the state, including in some of the more in need areas. New Jersey, between our world class educational

institutions and our many highly trained and qualified union workforce, has historically been on the cutting edge of many industries and clean energy should be no different. Investing once again in our workforce to ensure they are ready and trained to create, deploy, and maintain innovative clean energy technologies will allow us to address both the challenge of mitigating disasters caused by a warming climate and produce enough domestic energy to power our future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Increase awareness of green economy and union career pathways

- Support the development of relationships between local unions and school districts to ensure students at all levels are aware of the various career pathways available to them, particularly within green careers, and the necessary reading and math requirements required to successfully enroll in a pre-apprenticeship or apprenticeship program. One example would be organizing and hosting localized “Green Career” fairs across the state that connect secondary and college students with representatives from the sector
- Connect programs such as the new “Fund My Future” program directly to local high schools to assist any interested students with receiving coaching and job training upon graduation
- Creating an educational toolkit distributed by the Department of Education to inform interested educators and students on the Just Transition framework and how to integrate this into the current curriculum to provide a holistic and systems-based approach to understanding climate change and clean energy solutions

Remove barriers and facilitate entry into the green economy workforce

- Expand grant funding for local community-based organizations providing support services (e.g., transportation, food, housing, childcare and technical skills training) to meet the needs of those who are underserved and/or underemployed

- Prioritize language access and inclusion in workforce development related literature and programs so residents across New Jersey are able to fully participate in identifying a career path and understand the importance of supporting the transition to clean energy
- Create a database within the NJ Department of Labor that outlines the work local unions perform, their respective hiring prerequisites and other post hire requirements, and the municipalities, counties, region or industries they cover

Strengthen cross-sector partnerships

- Increase workforce grant partnerships with New Jersey state agencies, local unions, training partners, and community based organizations to ensure career pathways are available following the completion of training and certification programs
- Expand state-funded grant opportunities for unions to access and increase training facility space(s) and to reshape the ways in which they are currently working with outside organizations to develop apprenticeship pathways

standards. In New Jersey, there is no statewide heat standard. Some unions whose members are at a particularly high risk have negotiated heat related protections into their contracts, but this is far from universal and does not protect thousands of workers, both unionized and not, who deal with increasingly common extreme heat conditions.

In addition to heat, workers and the public in our state face significant threats from chemical disasters. There are approximately 90 facilities in New Jersey that use hazardous materials regulated under federal and state law. Additionally, trains carrying hazardous materials, both for use in state and for export at our ports, are daily occurrences on our over 1,000 miles of freight rail tracks. Almost all of these chemicals are necessary for industry operations, but that does not negate their risk if workers and the public are exposed as a result of

an unintended disaster. New Jersey was a leader in adopting the Toxic Catastrophe Prevention Act (TCPA) in 1986, four years before the federal government introduced the Risk Management Plan (RMP) through amendments to the Clean Air Act in 1990. TCPA was readopted and updated in 2003, but needs to be updated based on new data and threats, especially with the risk of a weakened federal RMP. While protections against disasters originating in facilities have been relatively strong, rail safety, as demonstrated by frequent derailments and the recent East Palestine rail disaster, is lagging behind. Common sense regulations can be implemented by the state to decrease the probability of a major incident. Finally, for both facilities and rail, we must increase information given to first responders, as well as the public more broadly, so they can be better prepared in the event of a disaster to contain and limit the impacts.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Implement a statewide heat standard

- Pass legislation (currently A5022) to create a statewide heat standard to protect workers in most industries
- Limit industry carve outs to the protections, as much as feasible, to ensure the largest number of workers possible are covered by the standard
- Ensure sufficient enforcement mechanisms are in place to protect workers
- Permit and encourage workers covered by a collective bargaining agreement to negotiate above and beyond protection for workplaces or facilities that pose an especially high heat risk through their union representatives

Adopt common sense chemical safety laws and regulations

- Strengthen TCPA
 - Formally adopt the Safer Communities by Chemical Accident Prevention rule, which finalizes revisions to the Risk Management Program to further protect vulnerable communities from chemical accidents, especially those living near facilities in industry sectors with high accident rates.
 - Cover industrial warehouses (and potentially other types of facilities) that store large quantities of “hazardous” – not just “extraordinarily hazardous” – substances
 - Improve TCPA rules for better evaluation of potential risks and implementation of practicable, inherently safer, processes and designs
 - Increase public transparency of chemical safety information submitted by facilities to the Department of Environmental Protection

- Pass and enforce rail safety legislation, currently A4460/S3389, that requires two man crews, wayside detectors, the sharing of bridge inspection reports with the state, and limits the length of trains carrying hazardous materials

Expand “Right to Know” for first responders and the public

- Create and expand information sharing systems for first responders to include details about chemicals stored and being transported in their jurisdiction so they have the ability to properly respond in the event of a disaster
- Secure funding for additional first responder training on how to appropriately deal with various chemical disasters
- Increase public transparency, without compromising security, so that the public can take appropriate steps to protect themselves and their communities from chemical disasters

