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Saturday Feb 24

## Building a 'new energy' work force

Industry, education leaders partner for training as need for skilled workers may rise

By **Aaron Claverie / Daily News Staff Writer**

Energy company executives and Silicon Valley education leaders agreed Friday to work on developing training programs that will bolster the area's "new energy" work force.

That work force includes the engineers and construction workers who install solar panels, develop green building techniques and manage high-tech energy management systems.

As those industries expand in the coming decades, the demand for skilled workers is expected to rise.

The executives and education representatives, including administrators from the Foothill-DeAnza Community College District and West Valley-Mission Community College District, were brought together for an all-day conference in Santa Clara by SV Works, the Silicon Valley Workforce Development Coalition.

The coalition is a public-private partnership linking more than 200 Silicon Valley companies and public agencies.

There is a glaring need for solar panel installers in the new energy industry, said Tom McCalmont, president and CEO of Campbell-based REgrid Power.

As REgrid Power and other companies expand - McCalmont said his company is doubling in size each year - there will be a shortage of installers. Community colleges could help fill that gap by offering a certification program, he said.

When REgrid hires someone, McCalmont said it usually takes about a year to teach that person the intricacies of the job, which usually involves working with a team to install and activate a solar panel array that costs thousands of dollars.

About 10 percent of the power used in the state is produced by renewable energy, which includes solar, wind and geothermal sources. But the Legislature and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger want to increase that percentage to 20 percent or more by 2020.

Some audience members at the conference questioned how solar energy could help provide a big part of that power. The efficiency of solar power cells hasn't climbed much in recent years but the cost remains high.

The president of Santa Clara-based Miasole, David Pearce, said he is confident his solar

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technology company can lower costs by 60 to 70 percent well before 2015.

If that happens, the industry will be able to operate without government subsidies, which help keep costs low for home consumers and companies that invest in solar panels, Pearce said.

New energy work force training programs might be developed by the University of California and state college system, but community colleges are the perfect vehicle for this kind of training due to their ability to nimbly respond to technological changes, said Justin Bradley, director of the SV Works energy programs.

Future SV Works conferences will focus on other business sectors, including transportation and water, Bradley said.

E-mail Aaron Claverie at [aclaverie@dailynewsgroup.com](mailto:aclaverie@dailynewsgroup.com).

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