

# Green is the new blue

Whoever coined the term 'green collar job' should have trademarked it, because it's set to be the buzz word of the next decade if you believe some of Australia's leading recruitment agencies – and the CSIRO – and, well, just about everyone else you talk to in the industry. Sean McGowan asks, will your job turn green?

According to a study conducted by the CSIRO and released by the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) and the Dusseldorp Skills Forum (DSF) in June this year, more than 3 million Australian jobs are under threat from our efforts to tackle climate change.

But before you fall of your chair, ladder or dunny (yes we know HVAC&R Nation is popular reading there!), the good news is that despite the introduction of a carbon emissions trading scheme, employment is tipped to grow by 2.6 to 3.3 million jobs by 2025, with the vast majority of these 'new' jobs likely to be green collar ones.

The CSIRO report, *Growing the Green Collar Economy*, identifies the employment impact of action to cut greenhouse gas emissions in Australia and examines the skills, training and workforce implications.

Using two different economic models, the CSIRO found that if Australia takes significant action to cut greenhouse gas emissions, national employment will still increase by between 2.6 million and 3.3 million over the next two decades.

Furthermore, jobs in sectors that are currently high carbon emitters, like transport, construction, agriculture, manufacturing and mining are still forecast to grow strongly in the next decade, however it is likely that the 3.25 million workers in industries that currently have 'high environmental impacts' will require significant re-training to shift their skills from 'blue collar' work to 'green collar'.

"Climate change is both our greatest economic risk and, ironically, a great economic opportunity," says Ms Oona Nielsen, Executive Director of DSF.

"But only if the Australian workforce is properly skilled and resourced to underpin truly sustainable industries and workplaces. Little attention has been paid so far to this issue – yet it's one of the biggest transformations posed by climate change. Current efforts are clearly insufficient."

So with so many Australians, including many in the HVAC&R industry likely to be moving from their current 'high emission' employment to jobs with a greener tinge, just where will the opportunities come from?

## Following the global trend

Green collar jobs are by no means an Australian phenomenon. Already, the growing U.S. green collar market is the fifth largest sector in the country, with Democrat Presidential candidate Barack Obama pledging support to fund jobs training to ensure workers can be re-skilled to work in green industries.

A recent forecast by the American Solar Energy Society found that renewable energy and energy-efficient industries were responsible for the creation of 8.5 million jobs in 2006, with that number expected to grow to 40 million by 2030.

At the same time, another report published by the Worldwatch Institute revealed that while the U.S. renewable energy resources sector is set to enjoy massive growth, the country's coal, oil and natural gas industries employ increasingly fewer people.

## Green collar recruitment emerges

According to Dean Steele-Bennett, practice leader at Sustainability Jobs, a Melbourne-based agency specialising in sustainability recruitment, opportunities are already beginning to materialise in the market at a regular and growing pace.

"Green collar is a broad term and therefore many roles that are actually green collar jobs will currently sit within core areas of the business – the people recruiting and performing these roles may not even be aware that they are green collar jobs!" explains Steele-Bennett.

"For the most part, these roles will exist within the operations of the business with a mandate to improve efficiencies, reduce resource use and subsequent costs. The business process improvement will actually have a strong green or sustainability focus as the logic around business efficiency, cost reduction and use of finite resources is parallel to sustainability practices".

He says these opportunities will be present in most industries ranging from manufacturing, heavy industry, the construction and building industry, mining and resources, banking and many others.

With the emergence of the green collar job market also comes opportunities for recruiters to move into this space, and while some are already servicing the broader sustainability job market, others are yet to fully embrace the opportunity.

"They (recruiters) see it as a growing market but are having difficulty identifying opportunities and understanding how to structure their organisations appropriately to help clients to connect passionate professionals with an interest in this area to the right roles," remarks Steele-Bennett.

"We have had many clients approach us to find green collar staff for them and often the Position Descriptions they are using are not up to date with the demands that are going to be placed on that professional now and in the future."



*Kermit the frog recently conceded his mantra 'It ain't easy being green', was in fact wrong!*

"In the United States alone, coal industry employment has fallen by half in the last 20 years, despite a one-third increase in production," says the report.



Tim James



Jeff Simon



Dean Steele-Bennett

## Graduates lead by example

The move toward green collar jobs looks like being led by job seeking students, according to research, who are actively seeking roles in companies they deem to have strong credentials in corporate responsibility and sustainability.

A recent survey of over 4700 job seekers released by MonsterTRAK revealed that 80% of students are interested in a job that positively impacts the

environment, and 92% of students are more inclined to work for a company that is environmentally friendly.

Supporting the green collar trend, the survey also found that 32% of students are actively seeking an environmentally friendly job.

Similarly, businesses are recognising the value of recruiting skilled green collar workers as the looming impact of a carbon emissions trading scheme forces them to improve efficiency. With the current labour market so tight, those jobseekers with green skills are now in the position to be quite choosy with potential employers, and also name their price.

"Recruiters and employees want to attract and retain the best staff and overwhelmingly job seekers want to work for companies that are environmentally friendly, or work in a job that positively impacts society and the environment," says Steele-Bennett.

"And this is not just an Australian phenomenon either – there is global demand for green collar workers and this is expected to grow rapidly in the future. A global demand presents job seekers with opportunities for international employment and at a premium price."

Steele-Bennett cites the current demand for wind engineers in Dubai as a perfect example, where individuals willing to make the move have the opportunity to earn 30-80% more than they're previous wage.

"We are doing work in Dubai in this area and candidates are sometimes doubling their salary for a fixed 6 to 12 month contract and working on very innovative projects if they have significant experience."

## When will you put on your green collar?

In the HVAC&R industry, it could be argued that already many members have already made the switch from white and blue collars to the new-world green, with sustainability, ecologically sustainable design (ESD) and energy efficiency already well entrenched into the fabric of the building industry.

"The facilities management market as been heavily involved in green initiatives for some time, initially with a key focus on reducing operating costs through maximising energy efficiencies in the built environment, but with solutions to combat climate change high on the agenda, reducing the overall carbon footprint within the built environment has become a key focus for the market," says Tim James, senior regional director of Hays Facilities Management.

## Get your foot in the green door

Making the transition from one job to another is always a challenge, but those who are genuinely committed will be successful.

According to Sustainability Jobs, there are some things you should consider if you want to make the leap to a green collar job.

### What am I really passionate about?

Do you have a passion for improving biodiversity, tackling climate change or finding a solution to our water crisis? This will help you to focus on organisations and roles that are aligned to your passion.

### Are my skills transferrable or should I consider an interim transition in the short term?

You may need to develop your skills and experience in a shorter term industry or role to achieve your ultimate goal.

### What are my professional strengths?

Highlight your relevant skills and attributes. Skills and attributes that are transferrable across industry sectors are often of greater significance than experience.

Source: Sustainability Jobs  
www.sjobs.com.au

## Green collar numbers

**1 in 4**  
The number of U.S. workers employed in the renewable energy and energy efficiency industries by 2030

**81%**  
The number of Generation Y U.S. college students who say it is important to work for a green company

**2.7 million**  
The number of new green collar jobs to be created by 2025 in Australia

**32%**  
The number of job seekers currently looking for an environmentally friendly job

**\$US1 trillion**  
The revenue generated by the U.S. renewable energy and energy efficiency industries today

**3:1**  
The ratio of solar power sector jobs to coal fired electricity industry jobs per installed megawatt in Germany.

