

Construction pins hopes on green

JOBS: Energy Upgrade California is a statewide rebate program that will start lining up contractors later this month. Training will be necessary.

By LESLIE BERKMAN
The Business Press

SAN BERNARDINO -- Work-hungry contractors and the unemployed who crowded into the 2010 Green Job Summit in San Bernardino this week hoped that a new rebate program aimed at making existing homes more energy efficient will jump start the region's moribund construction industry.

The more than two-hour meeting hosted Wednesday afternoon by the city of San Bernardino attracted about 350 people, with the last arrivals obliged to stand in the back.

The audience was filled with seasoned veterans in the construction trades. Representatives of Southern California Edison Co., Southern California Gas Co., schools and various government and private agencies told them how to get training and certifications so they will be eligible to participate in the new business that is expected to materialize in months ahead.

Some people who had already taken a free course in home energy audits at Chaffee Community College had tags dangling from their necks that told contractors they were available for hire.

Their hope is pinned on Energy Upgrade California, a statewide rebate program that will start lining up contractors later this month. It is designed to spur homeowners to retrofit their homes to be more energy efficient and therefore cheaper to maintain.

Speakers from the utilities said they will provide rebates of up to \$4,000 to homeowners who take a combination of measures, such as insulating walls, properly sizing heating and cooling systems and sealing ducts, to reduce the overall energy demand of their homes by 10 percent to 40 percent.

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Terry Pierson / The Press-Enterprise

Ron Vicent, 52, of Chino Hills, listens to speaker Devon Hartman, president of Every Watt Matters, as a picture of smokestacks and pollution appears on a computer screen during the 2010 Green Job Summit on Wednesday in San Bernardino.

Speakers also talked about proposed federal legislation that would provide \$6 billion in additional energy retrofit rebates and how the city and counties of San Bernardino and the utilities plan to make loans available homeowners could use to finance the work.

Devon Hartman, president of Every Watt Matters, a Corona-based energy efficiency company, said California and the federal government are supporting residential retrofits to speed an economic recovery, lower greenhouse gas emissions and reduce the nation's reliance on imported fossil fuels. The energy demand of buildings is responsible for 43 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, he said.

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Casey Dailey, assistant to San Bernardino Mayor Patrick J. Morris, said residential retrofitting is a way to alleviate high unemployment in the building trades at a time when there is little chance of a quick home building revival.

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Tiger Adolf, Western regional director of Building Performance Institute, Inc., speaks at the summit in San Bernardino. Terry Pierson / The Press-Enterprise

"This is about putting people back to work in California," said Dailey.

Among those attending booths at the event were organizations that give energy retrofit certification training. Representatives from the One-Stop Career Center in San Bernardino said they will strive to match eligible workers with the new jobs.

Among those eager to know what green jobs are available was John Tymcheck, 25, from Yucaipa. He said he wants to get qualified in energy retrofitting to boost his income, which he said has been cut by more than half since he lost a railroad construction job 2½ years ago.

Another looking for new opportunity was David Agnew, 57, an architect from Riverside.

"I want to know how I can take advantage of this emerging marketplace," he said. "I need to do something constructive very rapidly because I have no income stream."

Rus Ouelette, who owns home remodeling and termite control businesses in San Bernardino, said over the last two years he was forced to lay off 10 employees and was searching for enough business to keep himself and his son working.

Ouelette said after listening to a couple hours of presentations he was suffering "information overload" but had jotted down the phone number of where to call to get free certification training. Pointing to a handwritten note, he said, "First thing tomorrow I will call this and sign up for the course."

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To participate

For information about job certification training to do work for Energy Upgrade California contractors contact:

Kenji Collins, project coordinator at San Bernardino Community College District: kcollins@sbccd.cc.ca.us

Contractors wanting to qualify for Energy Upgrade California rebate work should contact:

Cynthia Swaim at Southern California Gas Co.: 562-803-7438 or cmswaim@semprautilities.com

Amri Christianto at Southern California Edison Co: 626-633-3044 or amri.christianto@sce.com