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Central New York really cleans up in new jobs study

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By **Charles McChesney / The Post-Standard**

Peter Chen / The Post-Standard

Mark Smith (left), of Clockville, and Kent Bradley, of Oneida, both with Warner Energy Technologies, of Liverpool, install solar panels on the roof of OCC's Whitney Applied Technology Center in May.

Syracuse, NY -- With almost 10,000 "clean economy" jobs, Central New York has one of the most intensely green economies of any region in country, according to a study from the Brookings Institution.

Three percent of all jobs in the region's metropolitan statistical area — including Onondaga, Oswego, Cayuga and Madison counties — are in what Brookings defined as the clean economy. Those 9,648 jobs include people installing solar panels as well as those designing green buildings, water filtration systems and operating nuclear power plants.

Nuclear power plants are part of the clean economy because over the life of a plant "environmental damage is considerably less than similar damage caused by fossil fuel plants," said Jonathan Rothwell, one of the authors of "Sizing the Green Clean Economy."

Rothwell said the study was imprecise in some measurements. For instance, it counts all jobs at a company as clean jobs if the company's products include at least one organic product. Byrne Dairy Inc. made the list for that reason, Rothwell said.

The Brookings Institution looked at 100 regions across the country.

The 3 percent employment level earned Central New York an 11th-place ranking nationwide for intensity of green in the economy overall, Rothwell said. That ranking improved to eighth if only private-sector jobs are considered. Government employees involved in regulating green industries count as green workers, Rothwell said, and that gives state capitals a boost in the rankings if public-sector jobs are included.

Central New York's green intensity is a good thing, Rothwell said, because the clean sector of the economy has grown faster than the overall economy. Beyond that, the study said, "it will define our nation's low-carbon future while providing opportunity for workers at all levels of the income and skills distributions."

Nationally, clean jobs — which mean the same things as green jobs in Brookings view — have grown twice as fast as the overall economy. Research by Brookings found that local job growth in the clean sector from 2003 to 2007 was slightly below the national level. However from 2007 to 2010 — as the economy staggered through recession — local clean-economy jobs climbed 4.7 percent.

“It could very well pick up when this recession finally comes to an end,” Rothwell said.

In fact, he said, venture capitalists — the investors who help small companies become large companies — put nearly six times as much money into clean tech in 2010 as they did in 1995.

Contact Charles McChesney at cmcchesney@syracuse.com.

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