



Boston needs 100K new workers in manufacturing

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Massachusetts will need 100,000 new manufacturing workers in the next decade just to keep employment levels where they are today and stay competitive, according to the state's head of economic development.

"We're at a moment in time where either we're going to rise to the challenge in the next 10 to 15 years (or) ...we may lose some things irretrievably," said Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Greg Bialecki. "It's big."

There are currently 250,000 people working in the manufacturing sector, a number that has stayed more or less level for the past five years after 20 years of continuous decline.

Bialecki said the state's training programs for manufacturing workers — largely in community colleges and vocational technical schools — will need to greatly expand to supply the manpower to replenish a manufacturing workforce where the average age is 56.

"The industry is going to need everyone that we are producing and more to meet that challenge," he said. "We don't need 10 or 20 percent more, we really need to double (the number of people in training programs)."

Bialecki said the industry can remain competitive — particularly in advanced manufacturing producing products such as medical devices — as long as the workforce is there.

Steve Sawin, president and CEO of Operon Resource Management, a manufacturing staffing firm, said one of the most difficult things will be convincing new workers — especially younger workers — that manufacturing is a desirable industry.

"We need to initiate some type of public relations initiative that really changes the perception of manufacturing and brings young people to the door," Sawin said. "It's not their grandparents' manufacturing factory anymore, it's not a dirty, dank, unsafe environment."

Next week, Bialecki will be going across the state for Manufacturing Week, promoting the industry, especially to new and recent graduates. He will be going to community colleges and vocational and technical schools to showcase the opportunities in manufacturing.

“Our target audience is young people,” Bialecki said. “There are good-paying jobs available, it is a good career, it’s not a dying industry.”

Still, manufacturing workers soon will start to leave the workforce faster than they can be replaced.

“It’s going to get worse before it gets better,” Sawin said. “Attrition in the next few years is going to create a tremendous number of job (openings).”

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