

Puget Sound Construction Growth

The Puget Sound area has an unusually large volume of construction work right now, Sayre said. Building permits filed with the City of Tacoma suggest it won't slow down any time soon. The city has reported that permit applications for new construction totaled almost \$100 million in April, a record for the largest dollar amount in a single month. Mark Martinez, executive secretary of the Pierce County Building and Construction Trades Council, said the South Sound area lacks skilled trade workers, from roofers and carpenters to people who drive heavy equipment. I hear that from employers who call the union hall looking for workers, he said. There's a lack of qualified folks for a lot of projects that are going on; Retiring baby boomers account for some people leaving the work force. Construction projects for the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics are siphoning other skilled workers from Seattle and north across the border, Martinez said. That has created a shift of local workers north to King County to fill their spots; Not as many workers live in this direction to draw from, he said.

While construction in Pierce County is hopping, that might not be the case for the rest of the state. The industry, which generates 19,000 new jobs a year, saw a slight decrease in May of 500. It's the first time in a year the state has seen a drop in construction jobs. The state generated 92,900 jobs over the year, though job growth did slow in May. The statewide numbers are adjusted for seasonal employment changes, such as holiday or summer hiring.

The difference between state and local construction job growth didn't surprise Chris Johnson, the county's regional economist, who said the state data represents mainly the Seattle area. We have things here driving construction that aren't happening in Seattle, he said. Our property values haven't hit stratospheric levels, we have a military population that moves people in and out, all those things they don't have in King County.