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Texas faces labor shortage of solar installers

Solar installation companies are reporting difficulty finding enough qualified installation technicians in Texas, according to a report by the research firm Wood Mackenzie and the trade group the Solar Energy Industries Association. One of the complicating factors is that Texas regulations require electricians to be on site when solar systems are installed. The report found that installation companies need to either hire workers and train them or pay more to hire workers away from competitors.

Solar installers earned an average wage of \$20.52 an hour last year which worked out to \$42,680 for the year, according to the Department of Labor. The job typically requires a high school diploma. Job growth of solar installers is expected to grow 63 percent in the next decade, much faster than other occupations. The Department of Labor predicts the continued expansion of solar energy will result in excellent job opportunities, especially for those who take training courses at a community college or technical school.

Texas is the nation's fourth largest residential solar market. Homeowners in Texas installed 32 megawatts of roof top solar energy systems during the third quarter, a 32 percent increase compared to the same time last year, according to the report. The state has been slow to adopt solar because electricity prices are lower than the national average and there are no state laws that require power companies to buy back surplus power. The report predicts residential installations in Texas will reach 122 megawatts next year and 139 megawatts in 2021. One megawatt is enough to power about 200 homes on a hot day in Texas.