

Green initiatives create new careers
By Kristyn Schiavone, Tribune Media Services
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<http://www.chicagotribune.com/classified/jobs/chi-green-jobs-careers-20110312,0,3990866.story>

Move over, white- and blue-collar jobs. Today's focus on the environment and sustainability has given rise to a new category: "green" collar.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics received funding starting in fiscal year 2010 to implement a plan to collect data on green jobs. Under the "Green Jobs Initiative," two types of green jobs are identified: those that produce goods or services that benefit the environment, and those in which "workers' duties involve making their establishment's production processes more environmentally friendly or using fewer natural resources."

Pat Perry, senior group manager for the Target Corporation, has the latter type of job. Fifteen years ago, her environmental management role was mainly focused on ensuring compliance with government environmental regulations, such as the Clean Air Act.

Today, she says, sustainability plays a much larger role in her profession.

"Now, we're designing and developing products that are more environmentally friendly," Perry says. "We're calculating greenhouse gas emissions and looking at how we use energy."

The job requires thinking outside the box, like considering wind and solar energy to help the company reduce its carbon footprint. Perry also sits on various committees related to sustainability, recycling and energy.

Hereforgood.Target.com, a website about the company's commitment to education and the environment, details some of Target's sustainable practices: reducing store water use by 20-25 percent using a weather-controlled irrigation system and the recycling of a projected 180 million plastic bags, to name a few.

Perry got her start with a geology degree, working at a consulting firm as a geologist, and then parlayed her technical knowledge into her job at Target.

"The base is strong technical knowledge, but I think really the key is to be able to learn the business you're working in," Perry says.

Employees that are most successful in environmental management positions, she says, are able to pair scientific and technical knowledge with business acumen, which allows them to speak upper management's language when they relay ideas. Of course, future green workers also need a genuine care for the environment.

"I think at the end of the day, it's really about being able to make a difference in the environment," Perry says. "I know I'm just one small person, but every little bit helps."

Part of the culture

The National Association of Environmental Management (NAEM) brings together environment, health and safety professionals like Perry and helps promote global sustainability. Executive director Carol Singer Neuvelt says that increasingly, most companies have employees on staff who look at the sustainability of their organization and its environmental impact.

“From my perspective, in the next 20 years, the next dynamic field we are going to see relates to the environment and sustainability,” she says. “There is always going to be a strong need for environment, health and safety managers.”