

Report confirms labour shortage

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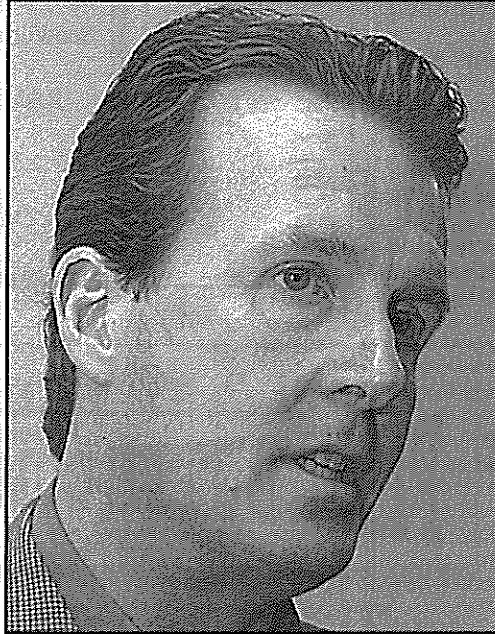
A national report released Thursday confirms what Saskatchewan's construction industry has known for some time — there is a shortage of skilled tradespeople in the province, and it's showing no sign of abating.

The report also shows that the current labour shortage is coinciding with an unprecedented construction boom, leading to delays and increased costs for projects large and small.

"The bottom line for Saskatchewan is that we are projecting continued economic growth (and) employment growth in all sectors of the construction trades over the forecast period," said Saskatchewan Construction Association president Michael Fougere. "An estimated 7,500 workers will be needed to meet new construction demand and replace retirees."

The report, released annually by the Ottawa-based Construction Sector Council (CSC), forecasts labour requirements and construction trends through more than a nine-year period for 31 trades by province.

According to the forecast, the potential economic growth of the province over the next 10 years will be "largely constrained to productivity growth, plus the contribution to labour force growth that results from attracting workers from outside the province and additional aboriginal workers from within the province."



Michael Fougere

Nationally, some 245,000 workers will be needed in the nine-year period to sustain expansion demand and retiring workers.

"I think the longer-term story for the industry and government is that we can't afford to look for solutions when we're in peak invest-

ment," said George Gritzotis, CSC executive director.

"Sure, the numbers sound challenging, but the whole idea of developing this model is so we can address that challenge ... In the past, we reacted to the peaks and valleys. In the future, we want to be able to anticipate the peaks and valleys."

Due to the limited availability of skilled workers, major projects slated for construction have raised concerns over potential delays.

There are a large number of manufacturing investment projects underway and scheduled for construction, Fougere said.

These include ethanol plants, an expansion of the heavy-oil upgrader, several food processing facilities and a possible poly-generation plant.

"If those projects come out all at once, we would not have enough workers to do the work," Fougere said. "It's a huge concern here for us — just for the viability and economic development of the province."

"This is part of the dynamic of what raises the cost of production."

In late March, the government contributed an additional \$23.6 million toward the construction of the lab building addition at the University of Regina to offset the shortage of skilled tradespeople and the escalating cost of materials.

When the project began five years ago, its budget was \$36.6 million.