

Big tech is laying off workers. The growing 'green collar' job industry hopes to recruit them

Three days after Justin Hardin started his job at Slack, the country went into lockdown. Soon, his hometown was facing another crisis as wildfires raged nearby.

"I taught myself to code to change the world," said Hardin, who is now a cofounder and the chief technology officer of the climate job board Climatebase. "Then boom, the skies in San Francisco turned orange, and I was like, what in the world is happening?"

When Hardin started his tech career, he had hoped to use his software engineering background to change the world. But most of his work was focused on ad products. By chance, he stumbled upon Climatebase's first Climate Career Fair, where he connected with cofounders and brothers Evan and Jesse Hynes. "That opened my eyes," he said. "I realized that as a software engineer, I can have an impact in this space and actually code for good."

Like Hardin, many Americans are joining the growing climate sector. It's a booming area of the job market where they sense economic opportunity and a chance to make a difference. What's driving this growth is the evolution many businesses are undergoing as they respond to the climate crisis. Bryan Walker, a partner and managing director at IDEO, believes that businesses are now entering the climate era.

"Climate, like the internet before it, will cause a huge, seismic change that businesses are going to have to reconfigure themselves around," Walker said.

The rise of 'green-collar' jobs

According to a Deloitte, more than 800 million jobs around the world are "highly vulnerable" due to climate change and the move toward net-zero. More than 13 million of them are in the U.S., notes Deloitte Global Human Capital Practice Leader Art Mazor.

"The vulnerability doesn't mean the jobs are going away," Mazor said. "Workers will need upskilling, reskilling, or adjustment."

More than 300 million additional "green-collar" jobs are expected to emerge by 2050, and transitioning the workforce to have the skills needed to perform in these roles is a big undertaking.

Deloitte's research shows that there are two possible paths of transition: one passive and one active. The passive path will see corporations worldwide achieve net-zero, but policy and the workforce won't work in concert to get there.

"We'll end up with a terrible skills and jobs mismatch which ends up limiting the growth of low emissions sectors and economies," Mazor noted. He adds that the active path will yield "a more rapid growth of the economy. We get to net-zero more readily, and the workforce has a clear path forward."

Data suggests that the sector is already rapidly growing, at least on the demand side. According to LinkedIn, demand for green jobs has grown by as much as 40%. Evan Hynes of Climatebase says the company has had nearly 1 million people apply for the more than 54,000 jobs posted on the site.

"Just in the last 30 days, over 6,000 applications went through the site," Hynes said. "We are seeing tremendous growth, to put it plainly, and I do think it's because we're seeing folks from more traditional areas of tech business and finance."

Resignations, layoffs drive the 'great realignment'

As more tech layoffs take place across the country, it's expected that more of these job seekers will move into the climate space. As Brendan Andersen, the founder of Climate People, a climate talent recruiting firm based in Boston, notes, the locations of these jobs will likely shift too. He says that Boston, New York, Houston, Silicon Valley, and Los Angeles will become climate job hotspots as the industry grows.

Andersen spent four years trying to find a single recruitment firm focused on staffing for green or clean tech jobs before launching one himself.

"The tipping point for a lot of folks is that the storms are getting stronger, the water level is rising, the droughts are longer, and the wildfires are more intense, and it's happening everywhere. As people are seeing it, there's a call to action," he said.

Businesses, too, are seeing that call to action, per IDEO's Walker: "There is a new customer base that has different values, there is a new employee base that has very different values, and there's been enough investment in the space that now there actually is real technology you could invest in and scale. I think a lot of that is helping this shift from a value-based conversation to actually a business-based conversation."

Andersen agrees that companies need to recognize the shifting priorities of job seekers to attract talent.

"Hires want to know about the mission and impact," he said. "That's a big shift directly attributed to a younger generation that prioritizes things very differently."

Evan Hynes of Climatebase calls this the "great realignment" of work. "What we saw with the great resignation was people just getting burned out. Now we're seeing the great layoffs. In both moments, it's lots of new talent entering the climate job market," he said. "The next phase that's coming out of the great resignation and the great layoffs is the great realignment."

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Region	November 2021	October 2022	November 2022	Percentage Point Change	
				1 month	12 months
San José–Sunnyvale MSA	3.2%	2.2%	2.4%	- 0.4	- 0.9
San Francisco MD	3.2%	2.1%	2.2%	+ 0.1	- 1.0
California	5.2%	3.8%	4.0%	+ 0.2	- 1.2
United States	3.9%	3.4%	3.4%	0.0	- 0.5

Sector — November 2022	San Jose MSA	San Francisco MD	Combined Region	Percentage Change (Combined Region)	
				1 month	12 months
Total Nonfarm	1,190,800	1,200,200	2,391,000	+ 0.3%	+ 5.1%
Construction	57,400	45,300	102,700	- 0.5%	+ 9.5%
Manufacturing	176,200	38,900	215,100	- 0.2%	+ 2.7%
Retail Trade	77,600	71,300	148,900	+ 1.7%	+ 1.4%
Information	114,500	121,700	236,200	+ 0.7%	+ 5.4%
Professional & Business Services	266,200	319,200	585,400	- 0.2%	+ 6.8%
Educational Services	48,300	32,700	81,000	+ 1.1%	+ 4.9%
Health Care & Social Assistance	144,600	120,000	264,600	+ 0.5%	+ 4.2%
Leisure & Hospitality	101,500	119,300	220,800	0.0%	+ 13.2%
Government	95,800	131,600	227,400	+ 0.7%	- 0.1%

Note: San José MSA (San José–Sunnyvale–Santa Clara Metropolitan Statistical Area) = Santa Clara and San Benito Counties
San Francisco MD (San Francisco–Redwood City–South San Francisco Metropolitan Division) = San Mateo and San Francisco Counties

Source: California Employment Development Department, LMID

	Labor Force			Employed			Unemployment		
	November 2021	November 2022	Change	November 2021	November 2022	Change	November 2021	November 2022	Change
California	19,129,000	19,218,400	+ 0.5%	18,140,600	18,144,600	+ 1.7%	5.2%	4.0%	- 1.2
Alameda County	818,900	827,200	+ 1.0%	784,400	801,200	+ 2.1%	4.2%	3.1%	- 1.1
Contra Costa County	548,400	552,700	+ 0.8%	523,600	533,900	+ 2.0%	4.5%	3.4%	- 1.1
Marin County	131,000	128,400	- 2.0%	127,100	125,300	- 1.4%	3.0%	2.5%	- 0.5
Napa County	67,600	67,700	+ 0.1%	64,800	65,500	+ 1.1%	4.2%	3.2%	- 1.0
San Francisco County	559,000	573,900	+ 2.7%	540,300	560,700	+ 3.8%	3.3%	2.3%	- 1.0
San Mateo County	442,300	454,300	+ 2.7%	428,900	444,500	+ 3.6%	3.0%	2.2%	- 0.8
Santa Clara County	1,030,000	1,055,200	+ 2.4%	997,500	1,030,400	+ 3.3%	3.2%	2.4%	- 0.8
Solano County	200,800	200,100	- 0.3%	189,800	191,600	+ 0.9%	5.5%	4.3%	- 1.2
Sonoma County	244,300	247,600	+ 1.4%	235,100	240,500	+ 2.3%	3.8%	2.9%	- 0.9
SF Bay Area (sum)	4,042,300	4,107,100	+ 1.6%	3,891,500	3,993,600	+ 2.6%	3.7%	2.8%	- 1.0

Note: Totals may not add correctly due to rounding

Source: California Employment Development Department, LMID

November 2022 Layoff Events			WARN SUMMARY	
Company	Location	# Affected	Events YTD †:	60
Aerotek	Milpitas	48	Individuals Affected YTD:	4,305
Astra Space	Mountain View	1	Individuals Previous YTD ‡:	8,304
Coursera	Mountain View	77		
Kitty Hawk	Multiple locations	100		
Natera	San Carlos	58		
Nuro	Mountain View	269		
Synthego	Redwood City	105		
Tremor International	Redwood City	49		
WeDriveU	Menlo Park	46		
Total		753		

WARN SUMMARY

Events YTD †: 60
Individuals Affected YTD: 4,305
Individuals Previous YTD ‡: 8,304

* **WARN: Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification**
(notice of mass layoff or closure)
† **YTD: Year to Date**
(Calendar year: January 1–Present)
‡ **Previous YTD:**
(Same date range as YTD, one year prior)

Note: Layoff data are preliminary and should be considered an estimate of monthly regional activity

Source: California EDD, CalJOBS: WARN data