



MAINTENANCE & TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL

Employment Crisis: A Report on the Need for Skilled Diesel Mechanics and Technicians

Last year, the Springdale Chamber of Commerce presented the first comprehensive study of the definitive demand for diesel mechanics and technicians in Arkansas. By meeting with and surveying 48 companies that ranged from small diesel repair shops to Arkansas's largest truck fleets, the Chamber was able to conclude that the technician shortage is hurting the local and state economy.

Key takeaways from the Chamber's regional survey of 48 companies:

- 75% report having a current shortage in diesel mechanics and technicians
- 80% report receiving two or fewer applications for each opening they have
- 75% rate the skill level of applicants as below average; 25% rate applicants as average
- The average mechanic/technician turnover rate varied, but reached as high as 25%
- 75% expressed concern over losing mechanics/technicians to retirement within the next five years
- Companies report it costs an average of \$20,000 to hire and train each applicant

Statewide estimates reflect as many as 5,000 openings for diesel mechanics and technicians. Diesel specialists can earn an estimated \$40,720 per year in Arkansas. With experience and additional accreditations these employees can make more than \$100,000 per year.

The shortage of diesel mechanics and technicians is only expected to grow with as much as 40 percent of the current workforce expected to retire in the next 15 years, resulting in an estimated 1,300 job openings in Arkansas. The retirement issue is particularly onerous as experts indicate it will take three people to replace each retiree in this field. Nationally, the Department of Labor estimates the country will need 77,000 diesel engine specialists in the next decade. As few as 3,500 diesel technicians are graduating each year from technical colleges in the United States. Failure to address this employment crisis will eventually impact economic prosperity for business and the workforce.

2017 Survey of Arkansas Technician Employers

Prior to today's meeting, Maintenance & Technology Council members were surveyed on the needs of technician employers and how well educational institutions in the state are meeting those needs.

Q1 Are your needs for properly trained and qualified technicians being met by the current educational system?

Seventy-three percent of respondents said No.

Q2 How many properly trained and qualified technicians could you hire if such were available?

Answers varied from none to 20 technicians, but the most common answers indicated that employers could hire between three and six technicians if the candidates were properly trained and well-qualified.

Q3 Do you feel that an industry supported accreditation is important for our educational facilities?

Every respondent agreed that accreditation is important for institutions that educate new cohorts of technicians.

Q4 Would you be willing to provide time, materials and possibly even manpower to the cause if incentives were offered to assist with the educational effort?

Most respondents indicated they would be willing to contribute to educational efforts if appropriate incentives were offered.

Q5 How many Medium and Heavy truck programs properly staffed, equipped and funded do you feel it would take to meet our current and future needs in Arkansas?

Only about half of the respondents answered (ranging from four to 15), and most respondents indicated they felt unqualified to answer this question.

Q6 Are you familiar with ASE and NATEF?

ASE: National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence

NATEF: National Automotive Technicians Education Foundation

Seventy-three percent of respondents were familiar with both organizations that provide standards for educational institutions to ensure they are preparing students for real-world positions as technicians, but 27 percent were not familiar with NATEF.

Q7 Do you think it is important for education to keep pace with the evolving technology?

Every respondent said Yes.

Q8 Do you currently see a four year degree as the only viable path to success?

Every respondent said No.

Q9 Would you encourage your own children to pursue a career in trucking? If no explain why?

Every respondent for which it was applicable, said he or she would encourage his or her own children to work in trucking.

Q10 Do you see the potential disruptors like electrification of vehicles and autonomous vehicles as significant in the future of trucking?

