

Hispanic Immigrants Crucial To Industry, Data Show

The Pew Hispanic Center has issued a fact sheet, based on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau, that shows just how dependent the construction industry has become on immigrant workers. “Hispanic workers, especially those who are recently arrived, are a vital part of the construction industry,” note the authors. “Despite the slowdown in the housing market, there are no indications that the role of foreign-born Hispanic workers in this industry might diminish in the near future.”

Other highlights of the fact sheet include the following:

- Employers in the South and West continue to rely most heavily on Hispanic workers. Taken together, those two regions employed 2.5 million of the 2.9 million Hispanics who worked in construction nationwide during 2006. The South and West also accounted for an increase of 293,000 construction jobs for Hispanics between 2005 and 2006, or about 79 percent of the total increase nationwide.
- While absolute numbers of Hispanic construction workers in the Northeast remained relatively low in 2006, at 249,000, that figure represents an increase of more than 30 percent from the year before — the sharpest increase in Hispanic employment of any region in the country.
- Of the 2.9 million Hispanics employed in the construction industry in 2006, 2.2 million were born outside the U.S. These foreign-born workers accounted for 19.1 percent of all construction-industry jobs, up from 17.1 percent the previous year.
- Nationwide in 2006, employment in construction grew by 559,000 workers. About 335,000 jobs — 60 percent of that increase — went to foreign-born Hispanics; of those jobs, 255,000 — or more than 45 percent of the total increase — went to recent arrivals, defined as workers who arrived in the U.S. in 2000 or later. Nearly one-third of all recently arrived foreign-born Hispanics worked in the construction industry at some point during 2006.
- About two-thirds of the increase in employment among all recently arrived Hispanics (not just those in the construction industry) can be attributed to unauthorized immigration, the center estimates. If that figure holds for construction, something like 30 percent of last year’s increase — about 168,000 jobs — went to newly arrived illegal workers.

The complete fact sheet, “Construction Jobs Expand for Latinos Despite Slump in Housing Market,” can be downloaded at <http://pewhispanic.org/files/factsheets/28.pdf>. — *Jon Vara*

■ NAHB is challenging a rule requiring some central California builders to reduce air pollution from off-highway vehicles like excavators and bulldozers (*In the News*, 2/07). The Indirect Source Rule (ISR), in effect since March, applies to new development projects expected to emit at least two tons of nitrogen oxide or fine particulate matter per year. Affected builders who don’t reduce on-site emissions — by updating equipment, installing pollution-control devices, or using alternative fuels — face a fee. In its suit against the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District, NAHB contends that only states — not local air districts — have the authority to regulate indirect sources of pollution under the federal Clean Air Act.

■ Real estate foreclosures for May 2007 rose by 90 percent from May 2006, reports the analytical firm RealTrac. Nationally, there were 176,137 foreclosures for the month, or one for every 656 households. Nevada recorded the highest number, followed by Colorado, California, Florida, Ohio, Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Indiana, and Connecticut.

Loyal Clients Help Chicago-Area Lumberyard Rally After Fire

When fire broke out at the Fox Home Center in the southwest Chicago suburb of Alsip on May 13, 2007, firefighters from two dozen area departments battled the 150-foot flames. It seemed likely that the yard would remain closed for months, if it even reopened. The fire consumed a 200-foot-by-90-foot main building containing Fox's offices, kitchen and bath showrooms, deck displays, paint and hardware departments, and molding room. Four large detached lumber sheds were completely destroyed, as well as a number of trucks and forklifts.

But incredibly, Fox missed only about three of its normal business hours — from noon on Sunday, when the fire was discovered, to its customary 3 p.m. closing time. At 6:30 Monday morning, as fire crews continued to pour water on the charred remains of the main building, the yard opened as usual, operating out of a smaller, undamaged structure located nearby that had previously been used for fabricating and assembling

fence sections and playground equipment.

According to Mike Laird — who, with his cousin John Laird, owns the family-run Fox yards — several factors made the quick turnaround possible. Another Fox yard in Frankfort, Ill., some 20 miles away, was able to step up and handle deliveries in the early days after the fire. In addition, all of the company's business and financial records were backed up in an off-site location.

Most crucially, Laird observes, Fox's 45 years in business have allowed it to develop an unusually loyal customer base and a dedicated workforce.

"Our customers have been great," he says. "They've stuck with us from that first morning, and they even jump in to help us clean up and move inventory around." Few, he believes, have defected to the half-dozen big-box home-improvement stores scattered within a five-mile radius of the Alsip yard.

As it continues to build up inventory in Alsip, Fox has remained almost fully staffed, with just two of its 40 Alsip employees on voluntary layoff since the fire, and another transferred to the Frankfort yard. By the end of the year, Laird hopes, the temporary storage containers currently serving as office and display areas will have given way to a new and larger main building. — *Greg Burnet*



A mere 18 hours after the outbreak of the massive blaze that destroyed buildings, equipment, and most of its inventory (above), the Chicago-area Fox Home Center was open for business at the usual time — if in somewhat scaled-down facilities (right).



Worker Injured When Scaffold Strikes Live Wire

A 25-year-old scaffolding worker was seriously injured in Harrison, N.Y., in June when a section of pipe staging he was assembling apparently touched a live overhead wire. According to Harrison assistant fire chief Dino Del Signore, the injured man, Tomasz Mamzer of Brooklyn, was on the third story of the staging when the accident occurred.

While visibly burned on the chest and back, Mamzer was conscious and breathing on his own when lowered from the site with the aid of a fire-department tower truck. "He had 7,600 volts pass through his body," Del Signore said. "He's lucky to be alive."

The accident is under investigation by OSHA, which does not expect to report its findings for several months. — J.V.

Recipe for R-Value

If two recent graduates of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute have their way, builders may soon begin using an innovative insulation board consisting largely of dehydrated mushroom cells.

Dubbed Greensulate, the board is made from a slurry of water, starch, and perlite inoculated with live oyster mushroom spores, plus some hydrogen peroxide to inhibit the growth of unwanted microorganisms. The mixture is poured into molds and kept at a constant temperature in a dark environment for two weeks to allow the cultured mushroom cells to grow; they consume the starch and produce a dense mat of fibrous strands that bind the perlite granules into a solid mass. Recent tests at the National Institute of Standards and Technology reportedly show that, after drying, the material has an R-value of 2.9 per inch.

Eben Bayer and Gavin McIntyre, the young inventors, hope to bring Greensulate to market within a year or two; no word yet on the product's pricing, structural qualities, or suitability as an emergency snack food. — J.V.

■ A Spokane Valley, Wash., contractor who swindled more than 100 area residents out of an estimated \$1.2 million for pole barns that were never built has been sentenced to 19 years in prison, according to the Spokane *Spokesman-Review*. Defendant Sam Cover had been convicted of 17 counts of the same crime in 1993. He typically collected one-third of the contract price from his marks in advance and another third when materials were delivered to the site; on learning he was under investigation, he sent letters to his customers claiming his contracts had been purchased by a new construction company that would snap into action after receiving the final one-third installment.

■ After paint manufacturers lost a court case in Rhode Island in May (*In the News*, 7/07), they came out ahead in two subsequent cases. On June 12, the Missouri Supreme Court upheld a lower-court ruling against the city of St. Louis, preventing it from going forward with a suit against makers of lead paint. Three days later, the New Jersey Supreme Court dismissed a similar lawsuit by 26 New Jersey towns and counties, ruling that the suit did not meet the public nuisance criteria under which it was filed.

■ ASHRAE has released the 2007 version of ANSI/ASHRAE Standard 62.2, "Ventilation and Acceptable Indoor Air Quality in Low-Rise Residential Buildings." Changes from the 2004 version include an option to use either climate-zone maps or heating and cooling degree-day data in determining how to apply the standard; performance data on new condensing dryers (which lack the exhaust flow of conventional units); and updated requirements for testing and rating ventilation fans.