



## Colorado jumps to third in wind energy employment

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Colorado in 2010 jumped to third nationally in total employment in the wind energy industry, according to a report from the [American Wind Energy Association](#).

More than 5,000 Coloradans are employed in the wind industry, the association said, a jump largely due to investments by the Danish wind energy giant Vestas, which has four facilities in the state, including a tower manufacturing plant in Pueblo that employs about 450.

Although the Colorado Springs region has so far seen only indirect benefits from the wind boom in the state, there are [four wind power companies](#) considering erecting turbines in eastern El Paso County in the coming year.

Overall, wind installations dipped in 2010 due to the economy, the association said, although the industry is still growing and has accounted for 35 percent of all new electrical generation capacity installed in the United States since 2007, second only to natural gas.

"Despite the economy and some uncertainties in government policies, we are still hitting double-digit growth," Elizabeth Salerno, the association's chief economist, said Thursday in a conference call with reporters. "Ten million homes could be powered by the current fleet of wind turbines in the United States."

Texas is far and away the leading state in terms of installed wind energy capacity, but growth there this year is predicted to slacken while it picks up in the Midwest and Northwest. Colorado receives 5.8 percent of its electricity from wind, the association said.

Salerno argued that this is a good time for utilities and energy companies to invest in wind, both because prices have reached as low as 5 cents per kilowatt-hour and because companies can lock in a roughly fixed energy rate for 25 years or more. Long-term contracts protect rate payers from volatile fossil fuel costs, she said.

"Wind is a good deal right now," Salerno said. "Costs have dropped dramatically even over the past 18 to 24 months. You can lock that in for your ratepayers and insulate them from any fluctuations they will see in the market."

However, transmission capacity is becoming a limiting factor in some areas. Increased transmission capacity is vital, not just for wind, but for all power sources, said Denise Bode, the association's CEO.

"When you've got a 50-year-old grid, you've got an interstate highway with a lot of potholes," she said.

Regulatory uncertainty is an ongoing problem for the industry, too, Bode said, since the federal government has typically extended wind energy incentives for only a few years at a time and the wind energy production credit expires in 2012.

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