

NEWS RELEASE

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Idaho's Jobless Rate Falls in April for First Time in Four Years

Idaho's economy generated more jobs than expected in April, putting over 3,000 people back to work and dropping the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for the first time in more than four years. The rate fell a tenth of a point from a record 9.7 percent to 9.6 percent. It was 9.1 percent in April 2010.

Just over 73,200 workers remained off the job in April, down 700 from March.

More people joined the work force during April and more found work than in any other month since January 2006, a possible indication of optimism among jobless workers that Idaho's labor market is finally beginning to open up.

April saw more jobs generated than normal in most private sectors including manufacturing and construction, which saw some strength in commercial building. Only hotels and restaurants performed below average for the previous five years. Government continued to lag behind the seasonal trend, feeling the delayed effects of the recession on tax collections.

After 33 months of year-over-year job declines, April was the fourth straight month that current job totals exceeded year earlier levels. The economy had 3,600 more jobs than in April 2010.

Idaho Department of Labor analysts believe the state's remaining manufacturers - after shedding nearly 14,000 jobs during the recession - have cut back as much as possible without closing down operations and should hold steady if not begin slowly growing again. Construction, which has lost over 21,000 jobs to the recession, may be returning to more sustainable pre-boom job levels although that sector must still work through a huge number of foreclosures and distressed homes hanging over the real estate market.

Analysts also believe a steady recovery of the employment services sector over the past 12 months is an indicator that some businesses want to take advantage of an improving economic environment by hiring temporary employees until they are more confident about the state's longer-term prospects.

Analysts also acknowledge persistent high fuel prices could impact the slow recovery that appears to have started but only in terms of stalling further growth - not causing new declines.

Nearly 2,500 new workers entered the labor force in April, pushing the total to a record 765,400, while more than 3,200 idled workers found jobs, driving total employment back over 690,000 for the first time since July 2009. April was the second straight month that more people found work than entered the labor force.

While new hiring by Idaho's 50,000 employers remained weak compared to prerecession levels, April marked the sixth straight month that new hires exceeded year-earlier totals. The Conference Board, a business think tank, reported that for the first time this year April saw fewer than four unemployed workers for each posted job opening.

Idaho's tenth of a point decline in a four months of record level unemployment at 9.7 percent ran counter to the national April rate which rose two-tenths of a point to 9 percent. But it was the fifth straight month Idaho's rate has exceeded the national rate after running lower for over nine years.

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As unemployment stabilized through the first quarter of 2011, benefit payments were running below 2010 by 32 percent. April unemployment insurance payments fell to \$42.9 million from nearly \$50 million a year earlier. While that was partially the result of modest year-over-year economic growth, nearly 2,000 more unemployed workers exhausted all their benefits - regular and extended - without finding jobs during the first four months of the year, bringing the total number of exhaustions to nearly 9,500 since the recession began.

Nineteen primarily rural counties posted double-digit unemployment rates, unchanged from March. Two major urban counties remained in double-digits, but the rate in Canyon County dropped a half point to 11.3 percent while the Kootenai County rate was off a tenth to 11.1 percent. The significant decline in Canyon County was enough to bring the unemployment rate for the Boise metropolitan area back into single digits at 9.8 percent. The other three metro areas remained in single-digits.

Twenty-one of Idaho's 44 counties recorded higher rates in April than March while 23 saw rates drop. Valley County saw its jobless rate jump a half point to 16.4 percent to remain the highest in the state after slipping below 16 percent in March.

Oneida County in southeastern Idaho recorded a half point decline to 5.3 percent to replace Owyhee County with the lowest rate in the state and the only county below 6 percent. Both Oneida and Owyhee were below 6 percent in March.

Seasonally Adjusted Data

	4/11	3/11	4/10
Civilian Labor Force	765,400	762,900	758,400
Unemployment	73,300	74,000	69,000
% Labor Force Unemployed	9.6	9.7	9.1
Total Employment	692,100	688,900	689,400

Unadjusted Forecast Data

Civilian Labor Force	761,800	760,000	756,900
Unemployment	73,900	78,900	70,800
% Labor Force Unemployed	9.7	10.4	9.4
Total Employment	687,900	681,100	686,100

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