

 Click to Print[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

# Hiring survey bullish on industry

By [John Schmid](#) of the Journal Sentinel

Jan. 1, 2012 | [\(15\) Comments](#)

Many Wisconsin machine shops and metal fabricators plan to add new hires in the coming three months, while papermakers and commercial printers might end up trimming staff.

The latest quarterly survey of the QPS Employment Group, a staffing and recruiting agency based in Brookfield, presents a January-March outlook of the state's major industries that's mostly mixed but includes a number of bright spots.

"In comparison to the fourth quarter of 2011, employers are slightly more optimistic when it comes to business conditions and hiring trends," QPS said in its analysis of its data.

The QPS survey is the latest economic index to curl upward, if only in selected sectors. The just-ended year finished on an upbeat note, mainly because none of the shocks in 2011 - the earthquake in Japan, Washington's near-default on the national debt and the European debt crisis - managed to derail the slow and skittish but steady national recovery.

In terms of hiring, however, Wisconsin's recovery has been more wobbly than the nation's. For the past five consecutive months, Wisconsin lost private-sector jobs even while the national economy added jobs in the private sector, according to monthly government jobs data.

That makes the QPS data significant. The survey is a bellwether because it offers a measure of industrial sentiment in an industrial region. The firm specializes in industrial and manufacturing trades. And nearly all of the 184 employers that it surveyed are from Wisconsin manufacturers with a handful from Illinois. The average company surveyed had 89 employees.

## Paper, printing soft

In Wisconsin, many of the metalworking manufacturing industries have been adding jobs

throughout the past year, which helped prop up the state, said Mark Immekus, a senior executive at QPS.

QPS found that 41% of the companies it polled plan to add hires, up from 39% in the fourth quarter of last year.

It's also higher than any previous quarter in the current recovery, with the exception of the April-June quarter - a short-lived period of bullishness, when 51% expected to add hires, but fizzled back into sluggish growth in subsequent quarters.

Another 9% said they expect to decrease head count. Most of these were in the papermaking and printing industries, Immekus said. Wisconsin has a preponderance of papermakers and printers.

Last month, Wausau Paper Corp. announced it would close its oldest mill, in the village of Brokaw, and lay off 450 millworkers. Immekus said large commercial printers, such as Sussex-based Quad/Graphics Inc., have seen their stock prices slump.

## **Skill shortage persists**

Also upbeat was the response to the question about impending business conditions.

Some 40% expect the economy to improve in the first three months, while 15% anticipate a decline. The rest expect no change.

Asked about the biggest impediment, two-thirds blame the economy. But the No. 2 obstacle to growth is the difficulty in finding qualified industrial workers, particularly welders and machinists, according to 43% of the respondents.

Even with a big pool of chronic unemployed in Wisconsin, business leaders consistently have complained throughout the recovery that industrial jobs go unfilled because employers cannot find qualified or willing job candidates.

The skills gap has left over a half million jobs unfilled nationally and about 5,600 vacant in southeastern Wisconsin.

In the poll, the skills shortage was a greater stumbling block than the cost of providing health insurance (37%); inflation in commodity costs and raw materials (33%); or government regulations (20%).

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.jsonline.com/business/hiring-survey-bullish-on-industry-ue3k5ds-136511983.html>



[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.