

Austin job picture remains hazy

Region's unemployment rate shrinks, but so does local job pool

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In a sign that Austin's job picture remains hazy, the region's unemployment rate dropped fell in November from the previous month, even as local employers continued to cut jobs, the Texas Workforce Commission reported Friday.

The area's unemployment rate was 6.9 percent last month, down from 7.2 percent in October, according to the commission. However, the rate still is up from 4.9 percent a year ago.

Meanwhile, the five-county region lost 4,300 jobs between November 2008 and last month, an annual loss rate of 0.6 percent.

There were some gains on a month-over-month basis, but those were due largely to seasonal hiring by retailers.

"Although we've seen some modest job gains over the last few months, we still haven't caught up to where we were before the recession hit," said Alan Miller , executive director of Workforce Solutions, the local work-force development board for the capital area .

"There isn't a clear trend yet in the numbers, especially since the majority of the growth is due to seasonal hiring patterns," he said.

Statewide, employers added 17,300 jobs between October and November, the second month-over-month gain in a row.

Texas' jobless rate was 8 percent, down from 8.3 percent in October.

However, state officials say they are beginning to see some improvement overall.

"Texas employers added a significant number of jobs in most industries during October and November," said Tom Pauken , chairman of the Workforce Commission . "Job growth, coupled with a lower unemployment rate, indicate movement in a positive direction for Texas."

Locally, on an annual basis, four major sectors saw job losses; construction and manufacturing posted the steepest drops of 7.1 percent and 11.2 percent respectively.

Among sectors adding jobs, the biggest increase was in the education and health services sector, which added 3,300 jobs, a 4 percent growth rate.

Other sectors posting annual gains include financial activities, business services, hospitality and government.

Other metropolitan regions also posted annual declines: Houston down 3.4 percent; Dallas 2.1 percent; San Antonio 0.7 percent.

Courtesy of JB Goodwin