

B.C. construction sector poised to grow, industry group says

Excavating and trucking sectors most optimistic among trades, according to survey

BY BRIAN MORTON, VANCOUVER SUN JANUARY 4, 2011 6:45 AM



Brighter Mechanical part-owner Bob Vincent, whose company retrofits buildings with new plumbing systems, says that as people realize the economy's stabilizing, they're getting work done on their buildings before they accrue additional damage.

Photograph by: Arlen Redekop, PNG

Richmond plumbing contractor Bob Vincent says 2011 is already shaping up to be a pretty good year.

The part-owner of Brighter Mechanical, who had to lay off about 25 workers during the recession, is now hiring again and expects to take on more employees in the coming months.

"We all took a hammering in late 2008 and we had to lay off a large contingent of people," Vincent said in an interview on Monday. "Work dried up and we had to manage our workload.

"But in 2010, there was a growing sense by our customers that work had to be done," added Vincent, whose company retrofits existing buildings with new plumbing systems. "We're seeing people realize the economy's stabilizing, so 'Let's get the work done before there's any more damage to the building'.

"It looks pretty good now."

Vincent's comments echo a recent survey by the Independent Contractors and Businesses Association (ICBA) that found its B.C. member companies are increasingly optimistic about 2011, with more hiring and construction activity planned.

ICBA president Philip Hochstein said member companies, which are involved in industrial, commercial/institutional and residential construction, got leaner and more productive during the recession and are now seeing "a light at the end of a tunnel."

He said ICBA surveyed its 1,100 member companies in 10 sectors in late 2010 about their outlook for 2011 and 2012, and that most expect their volume of work to either stay the same or increase.

The results varied, he added, but in eight of the 10 sectors more than 80 per cent said the volume of work will rise or stay the same. As well, he said, they indicated that they'd be more likely to hire extra staff rather than increase the hours of current employees.

What's particularly significant, Hochstein added, is that the most optimistic owners are in the excavating and trucking sectors — two areas that are early indicators of the construction industry's health. "They're like the canaries in the coal mine. They know before the others what the work volume will be. They're in the ground first.

"And most are saying that they're going to be hiring."

Hochstein said that 28 per cent of excavators said the volume of work would remain the same in 2011, with 64 per cent predicting an increase.

However, he added, prices are still competitive.

"If you plan to do construction work, now's the time."

ICBA member companies use either non-union workers or workers from unions other than the building trades unions.

bmorton@vancouver.sun.com

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