Employment up for US electrical engineers and computer professionals

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In what could be a positive sign of recovery for the U.S. economy, employment in three high-tech job categories ? electrical and electronics engineers; software engineers; and computer scientists and systems analysts ? returned to levels last seen in 2008, according to data released this month by the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

For electrical and electronics engineers (EEs), employment grew 7.8 percent from the fourth quarter of 2009 to the first quarter of 2010, and now stands 16.1 percent above its historical low in the first quarter of 2009. Software engineering employment was essentially unchanged quarter to quarter, but remains 5.3 percent above its first-quarter 2009 low.

For computer scientists and systems analysts, first-quarter employment grew 4.7 percent and is now 14.5 percent above its second-quarter 2009 low.

The unemployment rate for EEs has fallen from a high of 8.6 percent in the second quarter of last year to 4.6 percent in the first three months of 2010. In the other job categories, joblessness grew despite the stable or positive employment numbers.

For software engineers, the unemployment rate went from 4.1 percent to 5.5 percent quarter to quarter. During that same time, joblessness for computer scientists and systems analysts rose slightly (5.2 percent vs. 5 percent). This trend might indicate that displaced employees in these areas are again seeking jobs.

"As we watch for signs of recovery, we think it's important to focus on the employment numbers," IEEE-USA President Evelyn Hirt said. "Re-employed engineers, scientists and other technology professionals will help create more jobs and ratchet the economy forward."

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