

## Refineries may see gush of new employees

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TEXAS CITY — Enrollment in college programs teaching petrochemical and refinery process technology along the Gulf Coast grew by 23 percent this fall, according to a new industry report.

The information from the Gulf Coast Process Technology Alliance suggests efforts by colleges and petrochemical companies to attract young people are starting to work.

As baby boomers retire, the industry faces a massive work-force shortage.

“No one really knows how large the barrel is, but we’re estimating it’s about 10,000 (new workers) between now and 2010 that we’re going to have to come up with” — and that’s just for the Gulf Coast region, said Harry Wood, spokesman for the alliance.

The alliance includes 20 colleges in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi.

Those colleges registered 4,300 students in process technology courses this fall.

The report originally cited a 29 percent increase, but it was later discovered that the data from one college were interpreted incorrectly.

College of the Mainland in Texas City maintains the largest enrollment of process technology students among colleges in the alliance.

Fall enrollment in the courses is more than 200, according to the college.

That’s a drop compared to last fall, but overall enrollment at the college is also down, based on preliminary figures.

Bill Raley, dean of technical and workforce education at College of the Mainland, said a more telling figure is the trend toward daytime classes during the past three years.

Before 2004, more students enrolled in night classes than daytime classes.

Raley said the switch shows students want to move through the programs more quickly.

“There’s a lot of small families that are sacrificing to get the guy or gal through school quicker,” he said.

“A lot of that is because of the jobs that are out there”.

Wood attributes the interest to word-of-mouth news of high-paying refinery jobs, dispelling long-held assumptions that companies aren’t hiring.

Companies are going to greater lengths to support the college programs, and colleges are going to greater lengths to advertise the programs.

“All the schools seem to have made up their minds that they’re going to have these career awareness nights every semester and invite parents and teachers to the school so they can see what they’re doing,” Wood said.

At College of the Mainland, students can enroll in classes while they’re still in high school.

Inland colleges are starting to jump on the bandwagon, too.

Kilgore College in Northeast Texas began offering process technology courses this fall.

Wood said colleges in Dallas have begun offering the courses, too.