



ECA keeps an eye on foreign worker issues

Canada can expect to see an influx of Irish electricians according to the *National Post*, and that's an issue near-and-dear to the heart of ECA board member Dan Mott of Mott Electric in Burnaby.

Canada allows two-year temporary work visas for foreign workers from some countries, and Dan is involved with various education and certifying bodies to ensure that newly-arrived electrical workers meet Canadian standards.

"It's about productivity," Dan says, explaining why this is such an important issue for the ECA. "We want to be sure that the workers we hire have the skills they say they do."

Dan adds that certifying under-qualified workers can be a safety hazard for both the workers themselves and public that relies on professional contractors to deliver reliable work.

Irish electricians are particularly eager to come to Canada because the Celtic Tiger's sudden economic collapse in 2008 hit their construction industry hard. With a nationwide unemployment rate of 13 per cent, many skilled young workers are searching for foreign jobs. Ireland's Technical Engineering and Electrical Union even held a seminar for would-be emigrants last fall, and invited representatives from Canadian construction unions.

Their surplus of workers is good news for B.C. The Construction Sector Council estimates B.C. will have a shortfall of about 10,000 skilled trades workers over the next eight years, and it's likely that new immigrants and temporary foreign workers will be expected to fill the gap.

Ireland is just one of the countries Canada draws workers from, which is why it's crucial to have an effective model for assessing and certifying foreign-trained workers.

Robert Lashin, chairman of the ECA board, says that's only fair to foreign workers too.

"We ask them to come here, promise them jobs, and then in less than year they're left selling hotdogs on the street because they can't meet our standards," says Robert, president of Houle Electric in Burnaby. "I've seen it happen – it isn't fair to anyone."