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Sierra College to offer solar panel installation program

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Sierra College officials announced Wednesday that they will use a \$470,000 state grant to train students in the growing field of solar panel installation.

The college, along with other partners, plans to start a program in the fall of 2009, initially teaching 24 students in the finer points of the green technology. Eventually, more than 150 students would be enrolled in Sierra's photovoltaic panel maintenance and installation program.

A news conference was to be held Wednesday morning to announce the award from the California Community College Chancellor's office.

Sierra College is partnering with the City of Roseville in the effort. Students will take some classes at Sierra and also work at the Roseville Corporation Yard on the city's photovoltaic system.

Leo Chavez, president of Sierra College, said the grant will help educate future "green collar" workers for solar companies, contractors and governments.

"Students will be learning how to install, maintain and about the safety issues involved," said Chavez. "One of the interesting aspects is that Roseville and other fire departments will be trained on issues dealing with fires around photovoltaic systems."

Chavez said the number of solar panel jobs are rapidly growing but there are not enough people trained in the speciality.

"What I like about it is that we were able to enter into a partnership with Roseville, Nevada County and private companies such as California Solar Electric, Planet Solar and Sierra Solar."

The companies will provide expertise, equipment and other contributions.

The time before program start-up in 2009 will be spent developing curriculum.

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