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Understanding the NumbersWhen reviewing job growth and salary information, it"s important to remember that actual numbers can vary due to many different factors -- like years of experience in the role, industry of employment, geographic location, worker skill and economic conditions. Cited projections do not guarantee actual salary or job growth.

As government agencies, corporate leaders and individuals worldwide seek to slow the impact of climate change and create a more sustainable future, several types of renewable energy have seen significant growth.

According to a 2023 report by Deloitte, the U.S. Energy Information Administration expects the use of renewable energy to grow by 17% in 2024, accounting for almost a quarter of all electricity generation in the country.

“This is definitely a field that is growing quickly,” said Mike Weinstein, director of sustainability at Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU), who also has years of experience in the environmental education and conservation fields. “The urgency is clearer, the technology is available, and governments and other organizations are funding renewables more than ever.”

If you’re interested in playing a role in building a more sustainable futurefor your community and beyond, a career in renewable energy could be a good fit. But first, it’s important to explore the types of renewable energy and their impact on the environment.

According to Weinstein, renewable energy is any energy source that is replenished faster than it’s used. Renewable energy is derived from unlimited natural resources, such as sunlight, wind, geothermal heat and the movement of water.

Renewable energy stands in contrast to commonly used fossil fuels, which include coal, oil and natural gas. According to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), fossil fuels are finite resources formed over millions of years. Fossil fuel industries drill or mine for these energy sources and then burn or refine them to produce electricity and fuel.

According to the DOE, burning fossil fuels releases carbon dioxide and other pollutants into the air, contributing to global warming. The burning of fossil fuels caused nearly 75% of carbon emissions over the past 20 years, the DOE reported.

Using more renewable energy plays a crucial role in reducing these carbon emissions, said Dr. Hamed Majidzadeh, an assistant professor of environmental science at SNHU. Majidzadeh previously worked as a program manager for South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium, a state agency that ensures the optimal use and

conservation of marine and coastal natural resources.

“Transitioning to renewable sources is imperative to meet the global target of net-zero emissions by 2040, a step necessary to limit global warming to 1.5°C and ensure a sustainable, low-carbon future,” Majidzadeh said.

While terms like renewable energy, clean energy and green energy are often used interchangeably, they are actually different things, said Weinstein.

“Clean” or “green” energy describes energy sources that don’t pollute the environment. Some forms of clean energy are renewable, such as wind or solar power. However, other clean energy sources, like nuclear power, are not, Weinstein said.

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