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## Cleveland workers earning more than rest of Ohio, report finds

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Cleveland area workers earned more last year, on average, than employees in other Ohio metropolitan areas, according to a Bureau of Labor Statistics report released Thursday.

And Greater Cleveland, which includes Cuyahoga and seven surrounding counties, ranked slightly higher than the national average.

The Cincinnati, Columbus, Dayton and Youngstown markets ranked below the national average for overall pay.

The survey compared 2007 wages in nine job categories. Northeast Ohio ranked at or above the national average in all but two of the categories.

Wages for transportation and material moving employees, including everyone from bus and truck drivers to parking lot attendants and crane operators, fared the best.

They earned an average of 5 percent more than the national average.

Wages for production, construction, and installation, maintenance and repair jobs ranked 2 to 4 percent higher than the national average.

Supply and demand could partially explain the rankings, said Marty Mordarski, director of research for the Employers Resource Council, a human resources and workplace consulting organization in Mayfield. A number of companies have had a hard time filling skilled positions and have had to raise wages as a result, he said.

Area layoffs might have also contributed to higher averages, he said. If companies base their job-cutting decisions on seniority, lower-paid employees are usually targeted.

White-collar jobs in Northeast Ohio, including those in the management, business and financial fields, were the weakest and ranked below the national average. In Ohio, only Cincinnati did worse in this category, which includes everything from chief executives to accountants and insurance professionals.

Wages are important, but they're only one factor considered by employees and employers, said Baiju Shah, president of BioEnterprise, which recruits health care companies to Northeast Ohio. The cost of living also plays a big role, especially when talking to people from the coasts, he said.

"Their pay out there is not significantly different, but the cost of living is extraordinarily different," Shah said. "That's when they really start getting intrigued by the idea of living here."

Relatively low job turnover rates might partially account for the Cleveland area's overall healthy numbers, said Jim Robey, vice president for research at Team NEO, which encourages economic development in the region. When employees stay with a job longer, they typically make more money than new hires, he said.

Northeast Ohio's relatively healthy wages don't necessarily mean the region isn't suffering, Cleveland economic research analyst George Zeller said. The average wages don't include job losses and the tens of thousands of unemployed people making nothing, he said.

"Is the region healthy?" he asked. "It depends who you're talking about."

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