



## **Aerospace makes comeback in San Diego**

By [Gary Robbins](#)

The county's aerospace industry has doubled in size during the past decade and badly needs more engineers, according to a new study by the San Diego Workforce Partnership, a publicly funded nonprofit that underwrites job-training programs.

The analysis said there are more than 10,000 people working in aerospace operations for companies ranging from defense giant Northrop Grumman, which develops unmanned aerial vehicles, to Quality Controlled Manufacturing, a small precision manufacturing firm in Santee.

The industry used to be much bigger; in the early 1960s, General Dynamics alone had 46,000 aerospace and defense workers in San Diego. But it went into a deep decline, especially in the early 1990s when lots of missile and aviation work moved to other areas.

A modest comeback is now underway, with most of the jobs being produced by small companies, the workforce partnership said in its report.

"We conservatively estimate that there are 10,000 jobs," said Tina Ngo Bartel, director of research for the organization. "The figure could be higher, but we're being careful because we know that the skill sets in aerospace can overlap with other industries."

The report is based on a survey of more than 100 local aerospace employers and a review of more than 10,000 online job postings. Bartel's agency collaborated with UC San Diego Extension and the East County Economic Development Council.

"Employers told us that they're having a lot of difficulty finding enough workers," Bartel said. "A lot of this comes from smaller companies who don't have as much name recognition as bigger ones, so some job seekers don't know they exist and go elsewhere for work."

The shortage of workers also reflects the need to more closely align what's taught in K-12 schools and colleges with the demands of industry, said Mary Walshok, dean of UC San Diego Extension.

"People in industry will tell you that they're not getting enough 'work ready' graduates from high schools, community colleges and universities," Walshok said. "The report clearly states that companies need people with specific skills in areas like aerospace engineering and management."

We need more courses where students can get practice-based knowledge. They need to know what industry wants.”

The report cited an especially heavy demand for aerospace and industrial engineers.

Local universities have been struggling to keep up. UC San Diego’s Jacobs School of Engineering enrolled more than 1,500 students in mechanical and aerospace engineering in 2010, a figure that’s been trimmed to about 1,200 because of overcrowding. San Diego State University’s undergraduate program in aerospace engineering has grown from 190 in 2009 to 329 today.

Students who pursue a career in aerospace can expect to fare well financially.

The report said the average salary across all areas of the industry in San Diego County is \$52,393. People working in research and development laboratories average \$94,420, and those in aerospace products and parts average \$84,582.

Bartel said in a summary of the report: “While many traditional manufacturing companies have seen a decline in employment over the past 10 year, advanced manufacturing industries that require highly technical and computerized processes such as aerospace have thrived in San Diego.”