



# THE VIEW FROM WASHINGTON

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## Personnel: The Heart and Soul of the Avionics Industry

Another year nears the end, and with the economy in the state it is, yearly reviews are a complex issue. Still, the end of the year is a great time to mine some statistics regarding the avionics industry.

One continuing trend this year is the exodus of high-quality avionics and maintenance technicians. To assist shop supervisors, I thought this might be a good time to discuss some of the resources available to the general aviation avionics industry in regards to personnel decisions.

According to the Aircraft Electronics Association's 2008 Rate & Labor Survey, which was published this fall, 86 percent of the membership reported that finding (and I would assume keeping) qualified technicians is a problem for the avionics industry.

The aviation economy is tight. Interest rates are rising. Discretionary spending is down. Unemployment is higher. And there are no avionics mandates on the horizon for 2009. Therefore, doing your annual homework is more important than ever.

Plenty of data is available, if you know where to turn. Labor, wage and benefit information is gathered for the avionics industry specifically and for aviation in general, as well as for competing non-aviation industries.

Where can you find good solid data? The U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics collects data about the avionics trades, aviation maintenance trades, labor forecasts and growth predictions. The Aircraft Electronics Association

has data available on general aviation trends.

The 2008 AEA Rate & Labor Survey reports shop and labor rates from the three U.S. regions (east, west and central), as well as the international regions of Canada, Europe and the South Pacific.

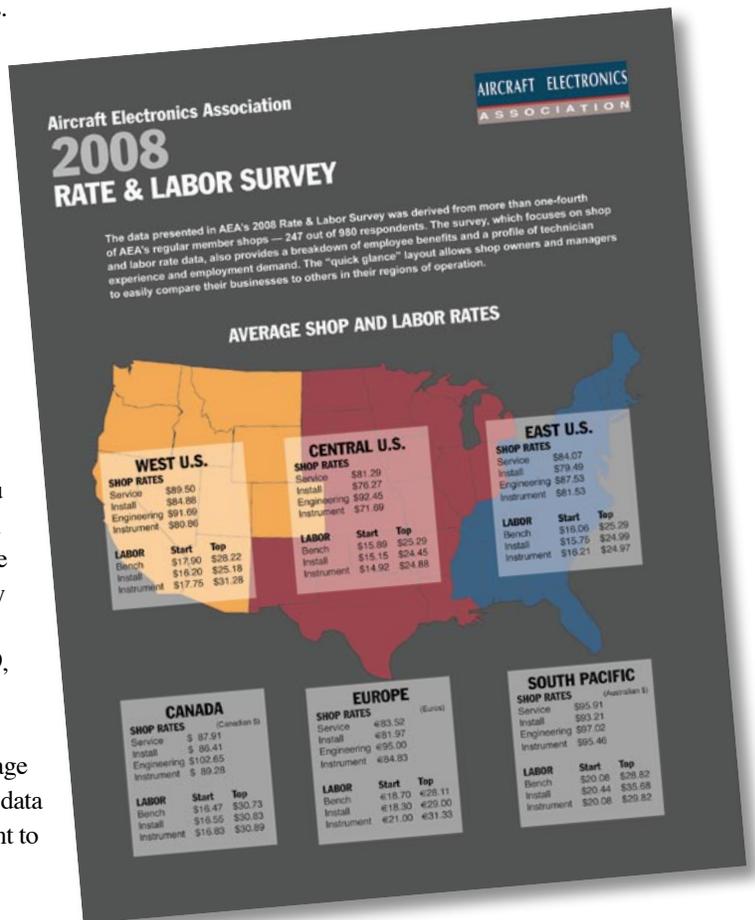
This annual survey reports the trends in avionics shop rates from 2006 to the present, as well as the range of labor rates and shop managers' salaries. In addition, the survey is valuable in that it shows the percentage of shops offering a wide range of employee benefits.

You can balance the industry specific data from the AEA with the industry general data of the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Occupational Employment and Wages for Avionics Technicians," as reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in May 2007, shows the mean national hourly wage for avionics technicians is \$23.19, representing a range from an average low of \$15.89 to an average high of \$30.40. This data is a good complement to

the AEA's Rate & Labor Survey because the Bureau of Labor Statistics data is for the aviation industry as a whole, including both the companies represented by the AEA and the manufacturers and airlines that might not be AEA members.

In addition to wage data, the Bureau of Labor Statistics also provides general employment data and the consumer price index for each region.

For example, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in March 2008, Orleans County, La., which includes the



city of New Orleans, had the largest over-the-year percentage increase in employment among the largest counties in the United States. Westmoreland County, Pa., near Pittsburgh, had the largest over-the-year gain in average weekly wages in the first quarter of 2008, with an increase of 14.9 percent due to an increase in the professional and business services sectors.

While the U.S. average weekly wage rose by 2.4 percent over the same first quarter of 2008, if you own a shop in the Pittsburgh area, you are competing for technicians with other industries for which the wages might have increased as much as 15 percent in a single year.

Not surprising, two of the top five paying employers are scheduled air and non-scheduled air transportation; however, the other three were a surprise: scientific research and development services; local governments; and technical and trade schools.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, aircraft and avionics equipment mechanics and service technicians held about 138,000 jobs in 2006 (the latest year of data); 122,000 of these workers were aircraft mechanics and service technicians, while 16,000 were avionics technicians.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of aircraft and avionics equipment mechanics and service technicians is concentrated primarily in a small number of industries.

A little more than half of aircraft and avionics equipment mechanics and service technicians work in support of air carriers, repair stations and support operations. Approximately 18 percent work in manufacturing, while about 16 percent work for the federal government. The remaining 15 percent of technicians work for corporate and cargo operators.

The top five employers for avionics technicians in 2007 were: aerospace product and parts manufacturing with 4,890 technicians; support activities for air transportation (including repair stations)

with 3,860 technicians; scheduled air transportation with 1,380 technicians; the federal government with 1,960 jobs; and navigational, measuring, electro-medical and control instruments manufacturing with 1,330 avionics jobs.

### Regional Statistics

How is the competition for avionics technicians in your region?

The five highest concentrations of avionics technicians as compared to other occupations are: Kansas with 940; Oklahoma with 810; Nebraska has 440; Utah with 440; and Arkansas with 400.

While the data doesn't specify who the employers are, based on the locations, it is evident where the large repair stations and government employers are located.

In all cases, the avionics trade represents less than 1/10 of one percent of the population in each state. This statistic highlights the reason community and career outreach efforts are vital for educating the general public about career opportunities in the avionics trades.

The highest metropolitan concentrations of avionics technicians are: in Wichita, Kan., with 910 technicians; Fort Worth/Arlington, Texas, metropolitan division with 880; Little Rock/North Little Rock, Ark., with 360; Warner Robins, Ga., with 260 techs; and Lafayette, La., with 130.

### Industry Competition

Growth predictions are strong; however, the predictions also are in line with the industries we are competing with for technical talent.

Employment of avionics technicians is expected to increase by 1,300, or 8 percent, by 2016. This forecasted growth is about as fast as the average for all occupations. This is important to know because we will be competing with non-aviation industries for a limited number of technically qualified individuals.

This forecasted growth is in addition to normal attrition. Through the year 2016,

most job openings for aircraft mechanics will stem from the need to replace the many mechanics expected to retire over the next decade. In addition, the industry continues to lose qualified technicians who leave to work in related fields because their skills are largely transferable to other maintenance and repair occupations.

Contributing to favorable future job opportunities for avionics technicians is the long-term trend of fewer students entering technical schools to learn skilled maintenance and repair trades. Many of the students who have the ability and aptitude to work on planes are choosing to go to college, work in computer-related fields, or go into other repair and maintenance occupations because of what they perceive as better working conditions.

If this trend continues, the supply of trained aviation mechanics and avionics technicians might not keep up with the needs of the air transportation industry.

As the growth of integrated systems continues, avionics technicians who also hold an A&P mechanic's license and are trained to work with complex aircraft systems will be in demand — and they will command the highest salaries.

While the data lags by about a year, the Bureau of Labor Statistics offers some vital information. This article is specific to the avionics trade; however, the Bureau of Labor Statistics provides data for related fields as well, which helps you look at other employers in your region and evaluate your ability to recruit and keep highly skilled avionics technicians.

The 2008 AEA Rate & Labor Survey is available online through the AEA's Resource One members-only website at [www.aea.net/R1](http://www.aea.net/R1). The Bureau of Labor Statistics' "Occupational Employment and Wages for Avionics Technicians" data is available at [www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes492091.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes492091.htm). □

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