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NAFTA Has Cost Ohio 45,734 Jobs Lost Since 1995, Study Says

By Mark Niquette

Ohio has lost 45,734 jobs since 1995 because of the North American Free Trade Agreement and comparatively low labor costs overseas, a new study says.

Of that total, 3,500 were in central Ohio.

Most were lucrative manufacturing jobs that were lost because production moved overseas or more products were imported, according to the study being released today by the nonpartisan Policy Matters Ohio.

It's an alarmingly high number, especially because the actual job loss is thought to be much higher because the available data are limited, the Cleveland-based group said.

"Trade agreements were supposed to bring more jobs to the U.S., but they've resulted in a net job loss," said Jon Honeck, the study's author.

The results are no surprise to workers such as Tom Mogan of Ashville, who was laid off last year at Thomson's television-glass plant in Circleville, in part because of competition from China, where wages average between 50 cents and \$ 2.50 an hour.

"Truthfully, I look for all manufacturing to be gone in this country," said Mogan, 39.

Stories such as this are turning trade and job losses into hot-button issues in this year's presidential campaign. In recent years, white-collar work has been outsourced along with manufacturing.

Policy Matters based its findings on the number of companies and workers certified under the federal government's Trade Adjustment Assistance program, which provides benefits to workers affected by foreign trade.

Thirty-one companies in central Ohio, including Thomson, and 3,500 workers have been certified since 1995, the study showed. Seventy-five of Ohio's 88 counties lost jobs for trade-related reasons.

Because the program is limited, the group looked at a study by the national Economic Policy Institute that examined U.S. imports and exports. It estimated Ohio lost 135,000 jobs, nearly 100,000 of which were in the manufacturing sector, between 1994 and 2000 because of increasing trade deficits.

Since 1999, Ohio has lost a total of 244,000 jobs, 191,000 of them in manufacturing.

Once workers lose manufacturing jobs, they often are forced to take lower-paying service jobs, Honeck said.

Licking County resident Vicky Rigio lost her \$ 20-an-hour job at the former Lucent Technologies Columbus Works in August 2002 and said she hasn't found another.

"Maybe I'll go to work at a grocery store," said Rigio, 48. "They can't outsource that because we have to eat."

Still, the United States can't abandon trade because it does create jobs, and protectionism would make matters worse, said Oded Shenkar, professor of management and human resources at Ohio State University's Fisher College of Business.

He said although some job loss can be expected because of trade, more can be done to ensure U.S. trading partners don't have any unfair advantages.

David McCall, president of the Columbus-Franklin County AFL-CIO, said the problem is "fair trade." He said other countries should be forced to follow the same labor and environmental laws as U.S. companies.

"We're still the richest nation in world, but we're rapidly giving it away in a race to the bottom," McCall said.

Policy Matters said more must be done to bolster job-training programs, help communities hit hard by manufacturing losses and support higher education.

Ross County resident Lisha Boyer, who lost her job at the Thomson plant in the fall, is using her job-training money to pursue a nursing degree -- and a better job than she had.

"(Losing a job) wasn't a good thing, but I'm making the most of it," said Boyer, 40. "Hopefully, I won't have to worry about going job hunting ever again."