



Helen Walrut has completed a course on carbon emissions and renewable products.

Photo: MICHELE MOSSOP

Green training in demand

Few vocations will be untouched by the transition to a low-carbon economy, writes **Joanna Mather**.

Paper importer and retailer Helen Walrut has just completed a course that taught her how to measure carbon emissions, reduce energy consumption and source renewable products.

Her Sydney-based business The Ribbon Supply Company is under no legislative obligation either to measure or reduce its carbon footprint; nor will it be under the Rudd government's proposed carbon pollution reduction scheme when it clears the Senate.

Yet Walrut is among a growing number of people seeking to gain formal "green" credentials.

Universities, TAFE colleges and private training providers are responding to anticipated demand, ramping up climate related courses in areas such as enterprise sustainability, carbon accounting and emissions management.

Walrut says the transition to a low-carbon economy is inevitable and she wants to be ahead of the game. "I think inevitably legislation will come into play and some of the people that I supply may well turn around to me and say, well, what's your carbon management plan and what are you doing about your carbon liability," she says. "I'd rather build the cost into my risk

management now than to be chasing my tail in two or three years' time."

Walrut did two climate courses and back in the office is making major changes to the way her business operates. She has hired consultants to conduct a carbon audit of the business and plans to stand out from the paper supply crowd by developing a carbon neutral cash register receipt.

"I'm accused of green bashing and I don't mind that," she says.

If Walrut is the exception rather than rule, it may not be so for much longer. Estimates are that more than 3 million workers will need to be retrained as we shift to a carbon-constrained economy.

Although much of the focus has been on the trades and high-polluting industries such as mining, predictions are that few vocations will be left untouched. It's not just plumbers, electricians and builders who must evolve, accountants, bankers, engineers and others also must.

Universities are gearing their efforts towards senior managers and the professions by offering short courses and postgraduate qualifications. Nearly 250 people have completed an accredited carbon accounting short course through Swinburne University's national centre for sustainability in the past 18 months.

Scott McKenry, who leads the centre's business and community services division, says demand is coming from upper-level managers whose roles have expanded to

include responsibility for sustainability in a rapidly changing regulatory environment. There are also business owners wanting to voluntarily reduce their emissions to gain a competitive edge, he says.

The University of NSW hosts its first course in carbon risk management through the Australian School of Business this month, while Griffith University has a graduate certificate in sustainable enterprise.

"Demand for the certificate has essentially come from industry in terms of triple bottom line pressures within organisations," says Griffith finance professor Michael Drew.

Enrolees are also looking to be more competitive in the jobs market, he says. "One of the identifiable cohorts is people who have done business degrees or engineering degrees who are very much seeing this as a vehicle to sharpen their skills in the sustainability area."

Eric Caesar, head of engineering for a large pharmaceuticals company, did Swinburne's carbon accounting course and has calculated that emissions trading could add \$500,000 to his company's costs. "Even though we don't have to buy permits or anything like that, we'll get the downwash so our electricity [costs] will actually go up," he says.

Caesar says the repercussions for all businesses of an emissions trading scheme are significant and they should be better prepared.