



# Employment Market Snapshot

## Light Industrial Positions

2nd Quarter 2026

### Key Market Insights

Recruiting for industrial and manufacturing roles in Wisconsin is being shaped by a unique combination of strong demand, limited talent supply, and rising skill requirements. Despite a slight cooling in overall hiring, manufacturers across the state continue to face persistent workforce shortages—especially for skilled trades and technical roles. Retirements and a shrinking labor pool are making competition for qualified candidates as intense as ever.

- Wage growth has largely stabilized across major markets, signaling a shift to a more balanced labor environment.
- Pay rates remain near historic highs despite slower increases.
- Localized markets like Beaver Dam are seeing stronger wage growth due to talent competition.
- Transportation access continues to influence pay, with higher wages required for less accessible roles.
- Geographic pay differences are narrowing in some regions as competition increases.
- Employers are relying more on total compensation and work environment as wage growth slows.

### HOURLY PAY RATE TRENDS

Over the past year, hourly pay rates for light industrial roles across Dane County, Beaver Dam, and Milwaukee show signs of stabilization following earlier periods of rapid growth. Dane County and Milwaukee both experienced only modest increases, indicating that wages are holding near peak levels as market conditions normalize. In contrast, Beaver Dam saw stronger wage growth, reflecting more localized competition for talent. Overall, the data suggests a more balanced labor market, where wage growth has slowed and employers are increasingly competing through factors beyond base pay.

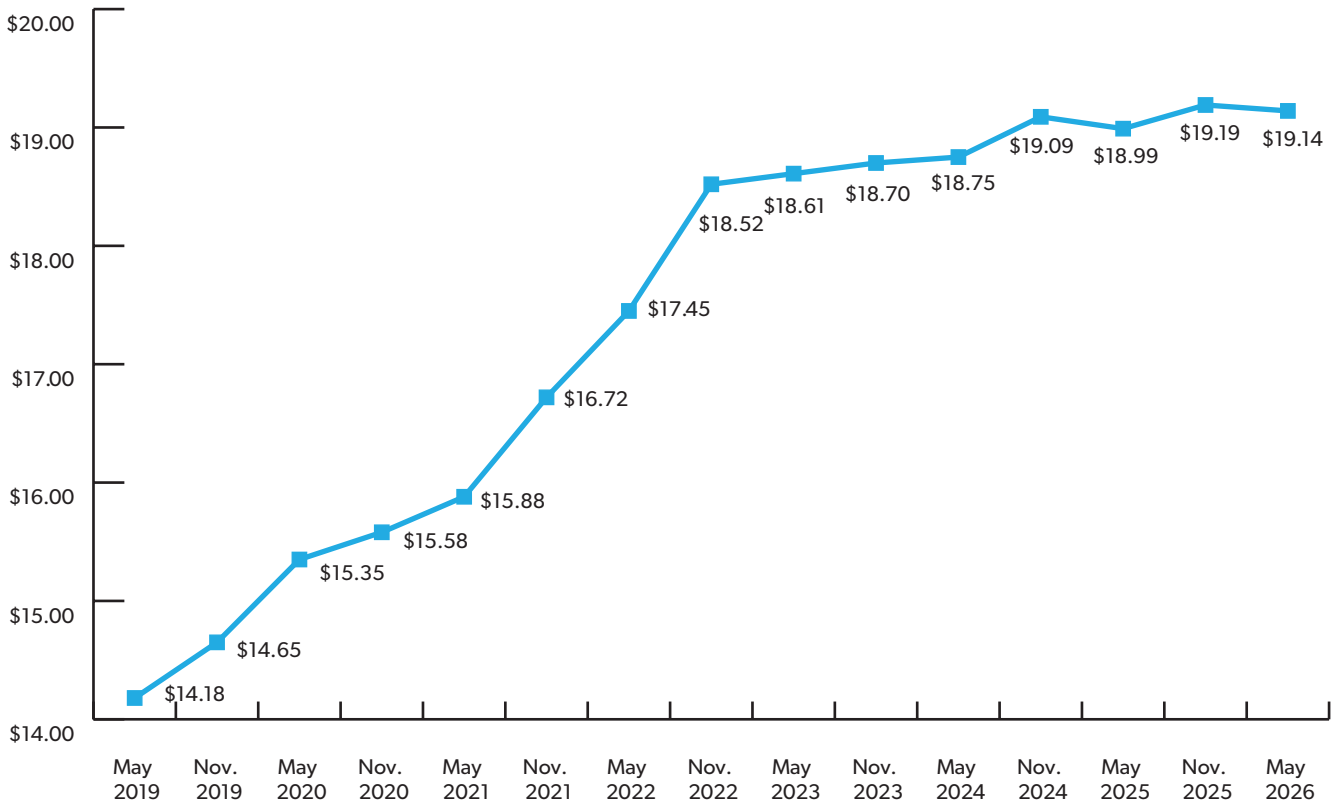
Average Hourly Pay Rates May 2026	
Beaver Dam, WI Area	\$18.88
Dane County, WI	\$19.14
Milwaukee, WI Area	\$18.60

*\*QualiTemps, Inc. payroll data - light industrial roles*

## BEAVER DAM AREA AVERAGE HOURLY PAY RATES



## DANE COUNTY AVERAGE HOURLY PAY RATES



## MILWAUKEE AREA AVERAGE HOURLY PAY RATES



## LOCATION-BASED PAY TRENDS

Location continues to influence pay rates across markets, though trends vary by region. In Dane County and Milwaukee, positions without access to public transportation still require higher wages to remain competitive, reinforcing transportation as a key factor in talent attraction. Meanwhile, in Beaver Dam, the wage gap between in-town and outlying roles has narrowed as employers within the city increase pay to compete for workers. Overall, location-based pay differences are becoming less pronounced in some areas, but accessibility—particularly transit—remains an important driver of compensation.



	On the Bus Line	Off the Bus Line
Dane County, WI	\$17.47	\$19.77
Milwaukee	\$17.55	\$20.61



Average Hourly Pay Rates	
Beaver Dam, WI	\$18.72
Greater Beaver Dam, WI Area	\$18.99



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## LOW UNEMPLOYMENT

Wisconsin continues to experience lower unemployment than the U.S. nationally. In April of 2026, Wisconsin's unemployment rate was 3.5% compared to the U.S. unemployment rate of 4.3%.

- Columbia County: 2.7%
- Dane County: 2.7%
- Dodge County: 2.7%
- Milwaukee County: 4.6%
- Ozaukee County: 2.9%
- Washington County: 3.0%
- Waukesha County: 3.0%

**4.3%**  
U.S  
Unemployment Rate

**3.5%**  
Wisconsin  
Unemployment Rate

*\*FRED April 2026*

## THE AI FACTOR

Advancements in robotics and AI are contributing to shifts in manufacturing workforce demands, increasing the need for talent with specialized technical skills. Roles such as CNC machinists, maintenance technicians, and automation specialists are becoming more critical as operations grow more technology-driven. As demand for these high-skill positions rises, employers are facing increased competition for qualified candidates, leading to higher compensation expectations and the need for more strategic approaches to talent attraction and retention.



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