State program helps Yakima Valley businesses dodge layoffs
By Michael Spears

YAKIMA VALLEY - It takes upwards of two months to train the average plant worker at Canam Steel in Sunnyside. “That’s quite an expense for us right there,” said Canam Steel Spokesperson Jesse Rodriguez.

And it’s a strain in the shaky economy.

That’s why Canam participates in Washington’s Shared Work program and has for the last several years.

It allows businesses to cut full-time worker’s hours up to 50 percent.

Those employees then collect partial unemployment to make up for the lost time.

The state says the Shared Work program helped save 32,000 jobs in 2010 alone.

Canam has about 50 skilled employees in the program.


Companies can participate for two years at a time and KIMA found more Yakima Valley businesses are taking advantage of it.

There are 365 more employees on a shared work plan now than two years ago and 62% of participating businesses say the program helped save their company.

It takes a highly-skilled worker to put together the steel beams at Canam Steel. The Shared Work program not only keeps these employees on the clock, but also protects the time and money invested in each worker.

PLSA engineering and Surveying in Yakima is another company using Shared Work.

The company says it would be difficult to replace the workers who would otherwise be laid off.

“You got your family,” said shared work participant Juan Ornelas. “That way you got a way to provide them and you are kind of without worries.”

It’s a sense of stability all because the state is willing to share the load.
KIMA learned the state paid out more than $22 million under the program last year.

Any registered business can sign up for it.

You can find more information by calling 800-752-2500 or by visiting your local Worksource center.