

South Carolina unemployment

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COLUMBIA — South Carolina's jobless rate fell for the sixth straight month in January, but state officials said Tuesday that the drop is mostly because thousands of people stopped looking for work.

South Carolina's unemployment rate was 9.3 percent in January, according to the state Department of Employment and Workforce. The agency says the drop in state numbers is mostly because about 7,900 people stopped looking for jobs.

In all, the number of unemployed people was estimated at around 200,000, which the de-

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partment said is the state's lowest level since November 2008. The number of people with jobs stayed relatively steady since December, at 1.95 million.

"The continued decline in the unemployment rate is something for South Carolinians to be excited about," Employment and Workforce Executive Director Abraham J. Turner said in a news release. "It is incumbent upon us, however, to continue to work diligently with businesses to identify

the skills necessary to match jobseekers to those jobs."

Unemployment was highest in Marion County, where 19.2 percent of people were unemployed, an increase of more than a full point from December. Lexington County posted the state's lowest jobless rate of 6.9 percent, slightly lower than a month earlier.

There were 11,200 fewer people working trade, transportation and utilities jobs in January, but overall, that

sector has gained 6,700 jobs in the past year. Professional and business services lost 5,800 jobs from December to January, while leisure and hospitality jobs were down 5,000 over the month.

In December, the state's unemployment rate plunged to its lowest rate in three years as an improving economy had employers putting more people to work making, moving and selling goods. The revised 9.6 percent rate was down from 9.1

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percent in November.

South Carolina's rate remained a full percentage point higher than the national unemployment rate of 8.3 percent and ranked as the seventh-highest rate in the nation. Unemployment was highest in Nevada, at 12.7 percent.

But federal officials said that, nationally, jobless figures continued to improve overall. According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, unemployment rates went down in 45 states and the District of Columbia last month.

Only one state — New York — posted an increase, while the other states' rates went down.