

The Environment Sector



The natural world fascinates us, sustains us and enriches our lives materially and spiritually. We rely on a healthy environment for the food we eat, the water we drink and the air we breathe. In fact, our health and prosperity depend completely on the natural world around us. In Canada, we are blessed with incredible resources and gifts of nature. Nevertheless, we are constantly challenged to protect our natural heritage, and to succeed we rely on the many thousands of skilled, dedicated professionals who work in the environment sector.

What is the environment sector all about? Well, the occupations are more varied than you might think, and they cross boundaries into many other sectors. Environmental practitioners work in the resource and manufacturing industries, government, schools, laboratories and research facilities, consulting firms... they're just about everywhere. It is a very diverse field—including chemists, engineers, biologists, business administrators, geologists, agrologists (soil scientists), health and safety specialists, computer programmers, social science specialists, doctors, lawyers and technologists—just to name a few. And although many people enter the environmental workforce directly from high school, it is well known that the further you take your post-secondary education, the further you can take your career.

Many people think that working in the environment means being employed by government or not-for-profit/non-governmental organizations, but the facts reveal a different picture:

- There are around 9500 organizations in Canada that employ environmental practitioners: 87% of them are in the private sector (of which only 7% are non-government organizations, like the World Wildlife Federation)
- The public sector (all levels of government) represents roughly 6% of all organizations employing environmental practitioners
- Another 3% are education institutions, and 4% are health care organizations

Any way you look at it, one thing is for sure: the opportunities are tremendous. The environment sector is one of the fastest growing areas of our economy, and it's not slowing down. In fact, the only thing preventing the industry from growing even faster is a shortage of skilled people. In the coming years, the opportunities will only get better as an aging population starts to retire, creating even more openings within the industry.

The lack of environmental specialists is affecting a variety of areas, from water resource management, environmental health and safety and wildlife management through to the engineering and technology side. There are over 4,000 openings for managers alone!

Consider this: 78% of employers in a 1998 survey said they are actively recruiting people. Many of the opportunities are international, as Canada is a world leader in many areas.

So the need for creative, devoted and motivated individuals is now. But where do you fit in? Not surprisingly, in a sector that includes occupations as wide-ranging as outdoor recreation specialist and economist, there is sure to be a match somewhere. Many occupations require

technical skills; some need scientific expertise. Employers also need people with business and management skills. And the environment industry is hungry for people with computer skills.

Not only are the employment prospects good, but there are also opportunities to develop skills on the job. New technology and processes are introduced almost daily, so environmental professionals are constantly learning new skills and acquiring more knowledge.

What is the nature of the work? Working through this guide you'll see that it's not all about cleaning up our past mistakes. It's also about preventing new damage, designing new and better equipment and creating new guidelines and procedures to lead us into the future. It's about working with people and pushing yourself, and being on the cutting edge of science, technology, business and public policy.

Take a closer look, and see for yourself. The prospects for personal adventure and professional growth are exciting and plentiful. But don't just take our word for it; get out and volunteer with local environmental organizations and businesses, interview people working in the industry or ask for more information from some of the professional associations on the web.

We think you'll discover that the environment sector truly is a world of opportunity.

Activities

1. Brainstorm a list of professions that use geographic knowledge and/or are involved in the environment sector of the economy. See how many different jobs you can come up with!
2. Check out the EnviroCareers website at www.cchrei.ca/envirocareers and/or any other resource that describes careers in the environment sector. Write a job description summary in your words for any two professions that are related to geography or the environment.