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## Environmental Health Practitioner

### Overview

Environmental health practitioners (EHPs) are dedicated to protecting public health by monitoring and recommending solutions to reduce pollution levels.

EHPs use specialized equipment to measure the levels of contaminants in air, water, and soil, as well as noise and radiation levels. Some also design solutions to reduce pollutants or assist in clean-up and remediation efforts.

EHPs can be generalists or become specialized in a specific area:

**Air quality experts** work indoors, monitoring allergens, mold, and toxins in the air, as well as outdoors, measuring the pollutants generated by businesses, vehicles and agricultural operations.

**Soil specialists** focus on risk assessment and reclamation of land contaminated by manufacturing processes, farming, garbage and other hazardous waste.

**Hazardous and solid waste professionals** look for ways to minimize waste production, safely move and dispose of waste and, when necessary, expedite clean up of spilled waste.

**Noise abatement specialists** protect our quality of life and our hearing by enforcing limits on ambient noise from vehicles, airports, construction and industrial sites, music venues, and even the barking dog next door.

**Radiological assessors** monitor radiation levels from power plants, medical and other x-ray equipment and natural sources.

### Working Conditions

EHPs typically work a standard 37-40 hour week, although overtime and weekend work may be required, particularly if the EHP assists with emergency response activities.

While much of the work is done at a desk, analyzing data and writing reports, most EHPs also spend a great deal of time in the field, inspecting sites and taking samples. EHPs use highly sensitive, and sometimes heavy, equipment to measure contaminant levels. They may be required to wear or carry this equipment for extended periods, don protective gear and work under less-than-sanitary conditions.

EHPs work for local, state and federal government agencies, consulting firms and industry. If they work for a regulatory agency, they can be perceived as “environmental police,” intruding on business operations, issuing citations and even forcing temporary shutdowns.

EHPs who work as consultants may focus on a specific geographic region or business area, assessing whether certain pieces of land are safe to build houses on, for example. Consultants and EHPs directly hired by companies may travel to various industrial sites to keep manufacturing operations in compliance with environmental laws.

Other EHPs serve on broad - even international - emergency planning and response teams, developing rapid-response strategies and racing to sites to speed clean-up efforts following natural and man-made disasters.

### Academic Requirements

Most environmental health practitioners earn a four-year college degree with a scientific major. Some states offer certification for EHPs who have a specified amount of work experience and pass an examination. Many EHPs have a master’s degree in environmental health science.

Acquiring a degree from an accredited environmental health degree program is highly recommended for individuals interested in entering the field of environmental health.

Accreditation helps ensure a well-prepared workforce and indicates that an academic program has been found to have the curriculum, faculty, facilities, and institutional support necessary to provide quality environmental health

education. The [National Environmental Health Sciences and Protection Accreditation Council \(EHAC\)](http://www.ehacoffice.org/) is the only accreditation body for environmental health degree programs.

Accreditation is important to many employers, as well, including the federal government. For example, only students from accredited programs are eligible to participate in the [Commission Officer Student Extern Training Program \(COSTEP\)](http://www.usphs.gov/student/) of the U. S. Public Health Service.

Because EHPs must work with many different types of people and report their findings, good written and communication skills are essential. It also helps to have acute senses and be highly observant. The work can be fast-paced, with tight deadlines and multiple pressures. It can get confrontational, as well, particularly for EHPs who work in enforcement.

## Preparation Timeline

### In high school

- Take plenty of courses in math, life sciences, physical sciences and English/writing.
- Seek opportunities to volunteer with environmental protection or public health concerns.
- Design a science fair project that addresses environmental challenges and suggest new ways to reduce pollution and improve health.

### In college

- Major in chemistry, biology, geology, hydrology, physics, environmental engineering or some other scientific area.
- Enroll in a summer program or internship that focuses on environmental health.

## Professional Associations

[The National Environmental Health Sciences and Protection Accreditation Council \(http://www.ehacoffice.org/\)](http://www.ehacoffice.org/)

[National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences \(http://www.niehs.gov/\)](http://www.niehs.gov/)

[American Society of Safety Engineers \(http://www.asse.org/\)](http://www.asse.org/)

[Environmental Protection Agency \(http://www.epa.gov/\)](http://www.epa.gov/)

[Environmental Health Services Branch of the Centers for Disease Control \(http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/\)](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/)

## Funding Opportunities

[Search for funding opportunities in this field \(http://www.explorehealthcareers.org\)](http://www.explorehealthcareers.org)

## Enrichment Programs

[Search for enrichment programs in this field \(http://www.explorehealthcareers.org\)](http://www.explorehealthcareers.org)

## Learn more about this field:

[Environmental Health \(http://www.explorehealthcareers.com/en/Field.24.aspx\)](http://www.explorehealthcareers.com/en/Field.24.aspx)

**Salary:** \$45,000 - \$113,000

**Years in school:** 4 - 6 \*

**Job outlook:** Very Good

\* after high school graduation

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