

# Employment Development Department

## Labor Market Information

**\*\*\* This is NOT a job offer \*\*\***

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### Environmental Health Specialists

California Occupational Guide Number 347

[Interest Area 11](#)

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#### THE JOB

Environmental health is a challenging and dynamic field focused on the preservation and improvement of environmental factors affecting the health and safety of our community. The impact of mankind on the environment increasingly threatens the quality of our air, water, land and food protecting and maintaining these essential resources is a national priority. Most jobs for ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SPECIALISTS are in government where they play a critical role in ensuring a high quality of life for future generations, through community awareness and education about environmental health issues and through the administration and enforcement of environmental and public health laws.

Environmental Health Specialists enforce health and safety standards relating to food and other consumer products. They conduct routine inspections of establishments open to the public to ensure that minimum health and safety standards are met. They investigate leaking underground storage tanks and oversee mitigation efforts for hazardous waste cleanup. They conduct water quality sampling to ensure that drinking water supplies are potable and palatable. Environmental Health Specialists perform inspections of public pools and recreational areas to ensure the public's safety. Environmental Health Specialists prepare inspection reports and issue notices of violation and needed corrections. Many local health department Environmental Health Specialists are deputized and may issue citations to appear in court when flagrant violations of environmental health and sanitation codes are found. Environmental Health Specialist also make surveys and recommend new or revised ordinances relating to environmental health. During routine inspections, Specialists assess the immediate environment to determine compliance with applicable codes. Specialists investigate radiation, disease-carrying animals or insects (vectors), air pollution, hazardous waste and toxic materials storage and disposal, land use planning, and

noise control and other occupational health hazards. They inspect food processing and food serving establishments as well as water systems, sewage systems, solid waste disposal facilities, medical waste, hazardous waste, and toxic materials handling and storage practices. They inspect industrial plants, detention facilities and other buildings such as apartments and hotels. Sometimes referred to as compliance officers, health inspectors or sanitarians, they enforce adherence to a wide range of regulations and laws that protect the public. Environmental Health Specialists review construction and equipment plans and specifications for the businesses and industrial plants they regulate. When investigating proposed subdivisions, they may collect data on soil conditions, drainage, adjacent sewer installations, water table levels, and other conditions. Environmental Health Specialists provide educational and consultation services in environmental health and safety practices. This may involve speaking to groups of industrial managers, food vendors, property owners, and tenants. It may include conducting classes and demonstrations on sanitary methods and procedures.

### **WORKING CONDITIONS**

Specialists are usually assigned to specific districts, performing all of the duties required in that district. They spend most of their time outside the office conducting field inspections and investigations. The work is often strenuous, requiring sustained physical effort in activities such as climbing, stooping, and walking. Workers in this occupation are often exposed to health and accident hazards. In seeking to eliminate disease vectors and hazards from toxic materials, there is risk of exposure to disease and potentially hazardous situations.

Transportation is usually provided by the employer; if employees must use their own car, the employer generally pays mileage.

Membership in one or more professional associations is customary. These associations include the American Public Health Association, the National Environmental Health Association, the California Environmental Health Association, and the International Association of Milk, Food and Environmental Sanitarians, Inc.

### **EMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK**

The following information is from the California Projections of Employment published by the Labor Market Information Division. These figures represent the broad occupational group Compliance Officers and Enforcement Inspectors which includes Environmental Health Specialists.

Estimated number of workers in 1993	20,820
Estimated number of workers in 2005	25,260
Projected Growth 1993-2005	21%
Estimated openings due to separations by 2005	6,040

(These figures do not include self-employment or openings due to turnover.)

Currently there are about 3,500 Environmental Health Specialists registered in the State. Growth in the industry is expected to be a little slower than average through 2000. Competition is brisk for positions. Most job openings will occur from replacement needs as workers leave the labor force.

### **WAGES, HOURS AND FRINGE BENEFITS**

Salaries for Environmental Health Specialists average about \$3,100 per month. Specialists working for the State of California start at \$2,900 per month. After a series of promotions, they can earn \$6,144 per month. Agencies in larger metropolitan areas usually pay the higher salaries. Normal working hours vary from 36 to 40 hours per week. Environmental Health Specialists may be subject to emergency duty, especially those working at the local level. Paid vacation and sick leave, health insurance, and a retirement program are the usual fringe benefits for civil service jobs.

### **ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS AND TRAINING**

A bachelor's degree in science or a degree that includes specific science course work is needed to become an Environmental Health Specialist Trainee. Qualified graduates first must get a trainee job with a city, county, state, or federal environmental agency; and then after up to 18 months of experience are eligible to take the Environmental Health Specialist registration examination. This examination is given by the California Department of Health Services, Environmental Health Specialist Registration Program, P.O. Box 997413, MS 7404, Sacramento, CA 95899-7413, (916) 552-9991.  
<http://www.dhs.ca.gov/ps/ddwem/environmental/rehs/rehs.htm>

Three State colleges and universities currently offer B.S. degrees in Environmental Health: California State Universities (CSU) at Fresno, Northridge, and San Bernardino. Master's degrees are offered at CSU Fresno, Northridge, and the University of California at Los Angeles and Berkeley, and at Loma Linda University. California State University at Fullerton and Los Angeles offer minor degree programs in Environmental Health. Most agencies select Environmental Health Specialists on the basis of an oral interview and information provided on the written application. Applicants for work with the U.S. Public Health Service must have a master's degree in Environmental Health Science. High school students interested in the field should take courses in mathematics, life sciences, physical sciences and English composition.

### **ADVANCEMENT**

Promotion in local agencies is usually from trainee, through specialist to senior specialist. With larger agencies, it is possible to advance to supervisor, assistant chief or director of environmental health. Experience in this field can lead to a research career; some universities maintain environmental health



Compliance Officers and  
Enforcement Inspectors

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Source: State of California, Employment Development Department,  
Labor Market Information Division, Information Services Group,  
(916) 262-2162.

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