

## Freight Handlers

(Laborers and Freight, Stock and Material Movers)

# What's this job all about?

Freight handlers move materials from one spot to another, like into and out of trucks. They load, unload, and stack a wide variety of materials that can be large, heavy, oddly shaped, fragile, or some combination of all of these. They must know how to move each type of item safely and quickly. Freight handlers use dollies, hand trucks, and wheelbarrows to move small or light items. They use hoists and cranes to move larger, heavier items.

Alaska is known for being a hub for transportation, so there is a real need for freight handlers in the state. If you are considering this job, you'll need to be physically fit, and you'll probably find yourself working in a wide range of weather conditions. Many Alaskans in this field say they like being able to move around on their jobs, so if you don't like to sit in one spot all day, this just might be a job you're interested in.

### Here's what Freight Handlers do:

- Use dollies, hand trucks, wheelbarrows, hoists, and cranes to move freight.
- Attach slings to steady loads while they are being moved.
- Guide loads to pallets, trucks, ships, or shelves in warehouses.
- Position containers in the correct spot to receive items.
- Brace loads to prevent shifting during transport.
- Install braces, pads, and straps to secure loads.
- Direct the spouts that transfer liquid items to new containers.
- Shovel some items, such as ice or gravel, into containers.
- Operate banding machines to band materials together.
- Maintain equipment by adjusting and replacing rollers, belts, plugs, and caps.
- Assemble and take apart containers and crates.
- Read work orders or listen to instructions.
- Keep records of what they move, using paper or hand-held computers.
- Monitor items by putting identification tags on loaded containers or marking them.
- Freight handlers who load and unload ships are called stevedores or longshoremen. Freight handlers also include furniture movers and baggage and cargo handlers.

### How much money can I make?

**Median Wage: \$13.26 per hour.**

In Alaska, the median wage for freight handlers is \$2,298 per month (\$13.26 per hour). Half of all freight handlers earn between \$1,896 and \$2,844 per month (\$10.94 and \$16.41 per hour). Nationally, the median wage is \$1,718 per month (\$9.91 per hour). Freight handlers often receive extra pay for working with difficult or dangerous cargo. Handlers who belong to a union often receive higher wages than non-union workers. Freight handlers who work full time usually receive benefits such as sick leave, paid vacation, and health insurance. Some employers also provide a retirement plan.

## HELPFUL HIGH SCHOOL COURSES

Although a high school degree is usually not required to work as a freight handler, it is important that you receive one to keep your career options open. Below is a list of high school courses that will help prepare you. You don't have to take all of them, but you should consider them in planning for high school. Some of these courses are also available at the technical or college level.

### **Business**

Recordkeeping

### **Computer and Information Sciences**

Basic Computer

### **Energy, Power, and Transportation Technologies**

Introduction to Mechanics

Energy and Power

### **English Language and Literature**

English and Language Arts

Reading

### **Health and Safety Education**

Safety and First Aid

Drivers' Education

### **Industrial and Technology Education**

Exploration of Careers

General Industrial Arts

Materials and Processes

Industrial Safety and First Aid

Equipment Maintenance and Repair

Industrial and Technology Education

### **Marketing**

Warehouse Operations

### **Mathematics**

General Math, Applied Math

### **Physical Education**

Physical Education

Fitness and Conditioning Activities

Weight Training

## How long does it take to receive training?

To work as a freight handler, you need excellent physical health and stamina, on-the-job training; and little or no experience. You don't need formal training to work in this field however, a good way to train for this job is to complete an apprenticeship. Formal apprenticeship programs include a combination of training on the job and classroom training. Apprenticeships in Alaska are sponsored by employers, employer associations, and some are jointly sponsored by employers and unions. Most freight handlers learn their skills on the job by beginning as helpers. Military experience loading ships, trucks, or cargo planes is good background for these jobs.

## When I'm ready to work, will there be job openings?

In Alaska, the outlook for job openings for freight handlers is good to 2014. Average growth is projected. Outlook information is not available specifically for freight handlers, however they are part of the larger group of "freight, stock, and material movers." As long as the economy remains strong, the number of items needing to be moved will continue to grow and cause a demand for freight handlers. However, an increase in automation may limit the growth of this occupation because with automated handling systems, fewer people are needed for manual loading and unloading. If the Alaska gas pipeline comes online, there will be a large need for this occupation.

***Please see the Training Programs section of this booklet to find out more about training in these career fields in Alaska.***

