

What's this job all about?

Hazardous material workers help protect people and the environment. These workers remove and dispose of harmful materials like asbestos, chemicals, lead paint, oil, aviation and motor fuels. Hazardous material workers remove these items in a safe and timely fashion so that they do not harm people or the environment.

There are many aspects of hazardous waste removal and varying levels of certification and licensing required by law, depending on the severity of the hazard. In Alaska, hazardous material workers are often the first responders when hazardous materials are released into the environment. Their first job may be to take immediate action to stop the release, then contain the hazardous material to minimize the impact to the environment. Later, they will be called in to clean it up. Mold removal is a growing area of work for hazardous waste removal workers, since mold growth is associated with health problems. Hazardous waste removal workers can and do play a role in oil spill cleanup and spills of chemicals that may occur. They also might deal with hazardous materials on old military and industrial sites, in the petro-chemical, mining, fisheries, healthcare and manufacturing industries. Cleanup of fires in locations like pharmacies or scientific offices, or even residential fuel leaks, may also be part of the job.

Here's what Hazardous Waste Removal Workers do:

- Remove lead paint by applying chemicals.
- Scrape off hazardous paint and store it in special bags.
- Use brooms, mops, and other tools to clean contaminated areas.
- Remove items that can be cleaned or must be disposed.
- Use radiation survey meters to locate and evaluate contaminated materials.
- Use high-pressure cleaning equipment to wash areas, and also package materials for disposal.
- Build concrete storage boxes.
- Transfer materials from the site to these cement boxes and other storage.
- Transport materials to treatment and disposal sites.
- Drive trucks and forklifts to move materials.
- Organize materials at disposal sites and make sure all items are labeled.

How much money can I make?

Median Wage: \$28.69 per hour.

In Alaska, the median wage for hazardous material workers is \$4,973 per month (\$28.69 per hour). Half of all hazardous material workers earn between \$3,753 and \$6,462 per month (\$21.65 and \$37.28 per hour). The wages vary by region and by the type of material handled. Treatment, storage, and disposal workers earn slightly more than asbestos and lead workers. Hazardous material workers usually receive benefits like paid vacation, sick leave, and health insurance. Some employers also offer a retirement plan.

HELPFUL HIGH SCHOOL COURSES

If you are interested in this occupation, you should take courses in high school that prepare you to get a high school diploma. Below is a list of high school courses that will help prepare you. While you do not have to take all of them, you should consider them in course planning.

Some of these courses are also available at colleges and technical schools.

Construction Trades

Exploration of Construction Careers

Industrial and Technology Education

General Industrial Arts

Materials and Processes

Industrial Safety and First Aid

Life and Physical Sciences

Biology

Chemistry

Chemistry in the Community

Physics

Mathematics

Integrated Math

General Math

Pre-Algebra, Algebra

Advanced Algebra courses

Physical Education

Physical Education

Fitness and Conditioning Activities

How long does it take to receive training?

To work as a hazardous material worker, you must have a high school diploma or GED, be in good physical shape, complete classroom course work, complete on-the-job training, and pass a federal or state licensing exam. Within hazardous waste operations, there are numerous certifications and licenses which may require 8 – 40 hours of training each. Annual refresher courses are often required to maintain certification. For example, hazardous material transportation workers must complete a 32-40 hour formal training program. These workers also take courses on safety rules. Many of the hazardous material workers obtain multiple certifications.

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

According to Alaska industry representatives, there is indication for a higher than average growth for hazardous material workers through 2014. Job openings will result from the overall growth of this occupation both in state and nationally. As older buildings are rehabilitated, they'll need both lead and asbestos removed from them. A new area for hazardous material workers is the removal of mold. In Alaska, especially in Southeast, mold can be a problem and people are increasingly becoming aware of health problems, such as asthma, that are affected by mold. The need for hazardous material workers is not affected by the economy. These workers will always be needed.

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

