

What Seafood Processors need to know

The Alaska Job Center Network would like you to read the following to help you prepare for a job or career in Alaska's seafood processing industry.

Job duties

- Unload fish from a boat, shovel chipped ice, clean and pack fish eggs.
- Butcher frozen, fresh or salted fish for marketing or further processing; move racks of product in and out of freezer room.
- Clean fish; scrape, cut, gut, head, wash, clean stomach linings; fillet; prepare for canning, freezing or smoking.
- Butcher live crab; prepare shellfish; clean, remove foreign matter; weigh; record weights; sort; pack in jars, cans, boxes or containers of crushed ice.
- Feed cans and lids into lidding machine, operate machines to move live or packed seafood from place to place.



Work environment

Seafood processing jobs can be rewarding, especially when there are opportunities to work overtime hours and save money quickly. The typical environment of a seafood processing plant requires most employees to wear rain gear, rubber boots and gloves to process and rinse fish as it is filleted, canned or turned into a value-added product.

Types of processors

Seafood processing plants may be shore-based, floating or at-sea.

- **Shore-based plants** are located throughout the coastal regions and along the major river systems of Alaska. The largest concentrations occur in Southeast Alaska, Prince William Sound, Cook Inlet, Kodiak, the Aleutian Islands and Bristol Bay. Within each of these areas, there are urban, semi-remote and remote sites. Plants located close to larger communities are easily accessible and often have several people applying for each job.
- **Floating processors** are plants on large ships and barges that usually anchor near shore and receive harvested fish for processing.
- **At-sea processors** are ships that operate in Bristol Bay and the Bering Sea both catching and processing seafood product such as pollock. Work on an at-sea processor is a great job for some people. You work, eat, sleep and basically spend the season out on the fishing grounds. Since you rarely get to a town, it can be an easy way to save money.

Housing / accommodations

Seafood processing plants in remote areas often provide employees with food and lodging and may charge a minimal amount. Others may provide meals but no housing. Hotels and motels are usually few or nonexistent; if they are available, rooms are expensive. Rentals, youth hostels, YMCAs and charitable organizations are not available in most processing plant locations. Camping is allowed in very few areas. If housing is not provided but camping is available, you may want to take a tent, tarp, stove, utensils and sleeping bag, just in case. Don't bring valuables or irreplaceable items. You may be living in a group situation. Always ask about housing and get confirmation about what a company provides before you accept any job.

Transportation

Find out what the transportation arrangements are before accepting a job. Employers try to hire close to the job site. Each company has policies on transportation, and job seekers must pay close attention. If you are hired by a company that pays your way to the work site, Alaska law requires the employer to pay your return fare – UNLESS you are discharged for cause, which may include alcohol consumption or drug abuse, prolonged unexcused absences, or if you don't tell the truth on your application for work.

Traveling seafood workers

This program offers extended work for seafood processing workers and helps ease the seasonal labor shortage. Moving workers from one completed contract to another as fishery seasons progress benefits everyone. Seafood processing workers and companies benefit from reduced transportation costs. Alaska Job Center staff work in Naknek, Alaska, during the peak of the Bristol Bay salmon season to recruit and relocate seafood workers who complete their contracts between late June and mid-July. For summer opening dates of the Naknek office and contact information, check the Seafood Jobs Web site.

Career

Seafood industry workers who take pride in their efforts, work well as a team and complete their employment season can do well in this industry, with opportunities to advance up the career ladder. If workers return season after season to a good company, they gain opportunities for advanced experience and additional training that allow them to meet their goals, such as to save money for school or move into higher paying jobs with benefits, including supervisory, managerial, quality control, sales, production development or corporate office careers. Finishing a season for a first-time worker tells future employers that you have a reliable work history and a good work ethic. To find out more about seafood career information, visit jobs.alaska.gov/seafood/careerstreams.html.

If you are interested in pursuing a fisheries-related career, you should learn about the A.W. "Winn" Brindle Memorial Education Loan, which can provide loans to Alaska residents for full-time study in fisheries-related programs. To learn more, visit acpe.alaska.gov/LOANS/WINN4U22. For information about Maritime Careers visit jobs.alaska.gov/maritimejobs.

Pay

Many seafood processors earn higher than Alaska's minimum wage. Please visit AlaskaJobs at alaskajobs.alaska.gov to see current wages available for seafood processors. Entry level, on-shore processors in remote areas earn a certain hourly rate when room and board and transportation are provided. Urban work sites without company housing pay a slightly higher wage. Hours and earnings are not guaranteed; they depend on how many fish are caught and when they arrive. A strong salmon run with work in excess of 14 hours per day, seven days a week and overtime at time and a half make it possible for an entry level worker to earn and save a good income in eight weeks.

At-sea processing workers are paid by percentage of catch, and if a company has a good catch, it is possible to earn thousands of dollars in shared income during pollock "A" season (January through April).

Costs

Employers must freely supply required safety equipment. Ask if there is any provided gear with a fee or that you need to purchase and bring yourself. For example:

- wet weather gear – (estimated \$100 per set) usually supplied
- rubber boots – (estimated \$40-\$70 per pair) usually supplied (for comfort, you may wish to purchase your own boots and wool liners)
- rubber gloves and wrist covers or sleeves - supplied
- bed roll and blanket or sleeping bag (estimated \$70 to \$200) – some employers suggest you bring for your comfort

Employees may also be required to use some of their wages to pay for room and board. It is highly recommended that employees ask the employer what gear may be required and what the room and board situation is prior to accepting a position.

Wage / hour and safety information

All employees should write the hours they work each day in a notebook so that if problems occur, you have documentation. The Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Division of Labor Standards and Safety (LS&S), may help people who have wage or safety problems.

For problems regarding wages, contact LS&S:

Anchorage: (907) 269-4900

Fairbanks: (907) 451-2886

Juneau: (907) 465-4842

For workplace safety issues, call OSHA: (800) 770-4940.

Employee safety issues that arise on an at-sea processor outside the three-mile limit are handled by the U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

Contact OSHA in Anchorage: (907) 269-4940.

For potential problems with wages earned on an at-sea processor outside the three-mile limit, call the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment Standards Administration, Wage and Hour Division, at (866) 487-9243.

Alcohol and illegal drugs

Alaska's seafood industry has a drug-free policy. Most companies require drug testing.

The interview

Pay close attention to a prospective employer's description of the job and working conditions – particularly on floating processors, out on open water fishing grounds or in remote sites. Alaska seafood companies work hard to process the harvest in a safe working environment because the work is performed with and close to machinery. A reputable company has well-defined personnel and safety policies and provides safety and health training for all employees.

Be sure you understand the employer's rules regarding hours of work, pay, room and board, and the possibility of transportation to and from the job site. Good companies will welcome your questions. If you have doubts, ask to see written policies. Carefully read any employment agreement before you sign. If you are not comfortable with the job offer or the working conditions, a simple "no thank you" is an appropriate response.

Documentation

By law, within three days of being hired you must furnish documents that prove your identity and show that you can legally work in the United States. Alaska Job Center Network staff will confirm that workers possess appropriate documentation before referring them to a job. For a list of acceptable documents, contact the Alaska Job Center or Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) office nearest you.

What else to bring

- Durable rain gear and duct tape for repair, knee-high rubber rain boots with wool liners, wool or polypropylene socks, bib-style waterproof pants, baseball hat and warm hat with ear covers for cold weather, three sets of warm work clothes, layered clothing in soft luggage or sea bag.
- Required medication (two months' supply), extra eyeglasses or contacts, towels/washcloths, toilet articles, nonelectric alarm clock, a small notebook to keep track of your hours and addresses.
- Identification and right-to-work in the U.S. documents.

Recruitment

The Alaska Job Center Network lists seafood jobs via AlaskaJobs (Alaska's online job bank) at alaskajobs.alaska.gov. AlaskaJobs allows you to search by specific occupation (e.g., cook, mechanic, quality control, etc.) or location (e.g., Naknek, Dutch Harbor, Kodiak, etc.), apply for jobs, and more. For information on job fairs and the location of our Seafood office, visit the "Seafood Recruitment and Hiring" page at jobs.alaska.gov/seafood/recruitment.html or the "Seafood Job Recruitments" page at jobs.alaska.gov/jobfairs/seafood.html. There is no fee for using Alaska Job Center Network services.

Applicants must be physically present in Alaska to be referred through the Alaska Job Center Network to one of these jobs. Employers also recruit workers through their companies or other reliable recruitment offices.

A map showing when fishery seasons occur in Alaska is available at cf.adfg.state.ak.us. Processing seasons vary by location, but those most in need generally are pollock "A" season (January through April), Bristol Bay herring season (mid-April for two to three weeks), salmon season (June through early September), and pollock "B" season (July through mid-November).

Web sites

For more information on jobs in Alaska, visit jobs.alaska.gov, or you can go directly to the Seafood Jobs Recruitment Web page at jobs.alaska.gov/seafood/recruitment.html to learn about scheduled seafood job fairs, links to related sites and job applications that are available for printing. You can also visit AlaskaJobs at alaskajobs.alaska.gov, which lists seafood jobs currently open statewide.

Contact information

- **Rural Alaska (villages and small towns) toll free:** (800) 473-0688
- **Anchorage:** (907) 269-4746 or (907) 269-4573 for daily updates
- **Relay Alaska toll-free:** (800) 770-8973



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