A challenging and rewarding job!

Working in the water/wastewater industry can be extremely rewarding since you are providing an important service to your community. Clean water is essential for everyday life. It takes a knowledgeable, dedicated and conscientious workforce to ensure the water we drink and the treated wastewater discharged both meet the public health and environmental standards of today.

Operators wear many hats. It takes special people to do this job. People who like to work with their hands, work both inside and out, and have a special interest in applying science and technology are well-suited for this career. For water or wastewater operators, no two days are the same. One day an operator may be repairing a leak in a water line, utilizing common hand and power tools, welding pipe and fixing a pump. The next day, he or she may be working in the laboratory testing samples for pathogens and microorganisms or operating chemical feeding devices and adjusting the amounts of chemicals. All of the duties are essential to protecting the environment and the public.

This career requires a great deal of training and experience. A college degree is of value but is not required.

*If you like a challenge and the responsibility of protecting the public health and the environment – this could be the career choice for you!*
Opportunity
Within the next few years, the job market for drinking water and wastewater system operators holds great promise as demand exceeds supply. As qualified operators are expected to be in short supply, those with ambition may see more opportunities for jobs that offer advancement, a choice of locations and utility size, work schedule flexibility, employer-supported training, and negotiable wages and benefits.

Preparation
For drinking water and wastewater operators, it is especially helpful to have some science and math knowledge, along with some mechanical ability. It is recommended that students take preparation courses in biology, chemistry and mathematics as well as some industrial art courses like carpentry, metal working, plumbing, and heavy equipment operation or automotive studies.

Requirements
Because it is extremely important that people receive clean drinking water, and that wastewater be treated and discharged in an environmentally safe manner, operators must be certified and competent in their abilities.

Drinking water operators are certified by the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS). Wastewater operators are certified by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

There are minimum educational and experience requirements specific to the various certification grade levels. All levels require a high school diploma or GED and on the job experience.

Operator Certification
There are a number of colleges and training providers that offer courses in preparation for operator certification. The DHS and DEQ also have approved lists of home study or online courses available for operator certification on their Web sites. A list of approved water and wastewater certification courses and workshops can be found at www.oesac.com.

Experience
Visit your community’s local water or wastewater department. You might be able to gain some experience through a summer job or internship. It would give you the chance to see if this is the career for you.

The Rewards
Most employment opportunities will be found with cities and local utility operations. Depending on the size of the utility, annual salaries can begin in the upper $20,000s, and reach more than $80,000 at the highest level. Oregon’s 2007 average hourly wage for operators is $20.51. Most employers also offer health care and retirement plans as well.

One of the greatest rewards for water and wastewater operators is knowing they are protecting public health and the environment while providing a much needed and valuable service to their community.