

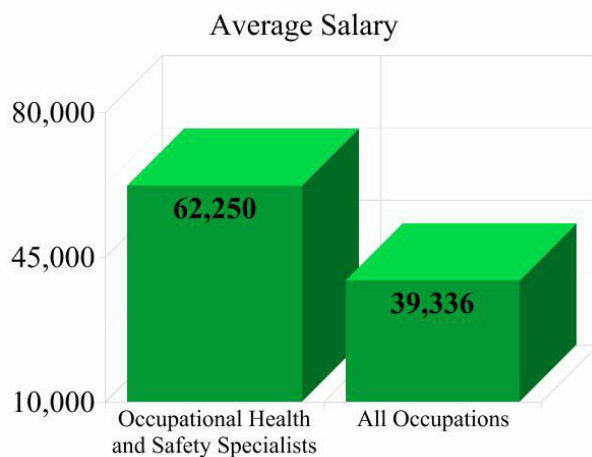
# Occupational Health and Safety Specialists

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## WHAT THEY DO

Occupational health and safety specialists, also known as safety and health professionals or occupational health and safety inspectors, help prevent harm to workers, property, the environment, and the general public. For example, they may design safe work spaces, inspect machines, or test air quality. In addition to making workers safer, specialists aim to increase worker productivity by reducing absenteeism and equipment downtime—and to save money by lowering insurance premiums and workers' compensation payments, and preventing government fines. Specialists working for governments conduct safety inspections and impose fines. Specialists often work with occupational health and safety technicians to ensure work place safety.

Occupational health and safety specialists analyze work environments and design programs to control, eliminate, and prevent disease or injury. They look for chemical, physical, radiological, and biological hazards. They also work to make more equipment ergonomic—designed to promote proper body positioning, increase worker comfort, and decrease fatigue. Specialists may conduct inspections and inform an organization's management of areas not in compliance with State and Federal laws or employer policies. They also advise management on the cost and effectiveness of safety and health programs. Some provide training on new regulations and policies or on how to recognize hazards.



Some specialists develop methods to predict hazards from historical data and other information sources. They use these methods and their own knowledge and experience to evaluate current equipment, products, facilities, or processes and those planned for future use. For example, they might uncover patterns in injury data that show that many injuries are caused by a specific type of system failure, human error, or weakness in procedures.

They evaluate the probability and severity of accidents and identify where controls need to be implemented to reduce or eliminate risk. If a new program or practice is required, they propose it to management and monitor results if it is implemented. Specialists may also conduct safety training. Training sessions might show how to recognize hazards, for example, or explain new regulations, production processes, and safe work methods. If an injury or illness occurs, occupational health and safety specialists help investigate, studying its causes and recommending remedial action.

Some occupational health and safety specialists help workers to return to work after accidents and injuries.

Some specialists, often called loss prevention specialists, work for insurance companies, inspecting the facilities that they insure and suggesting and helping to implement improvements.

Occupational health and safety specialists frequently communicate with management about the status of health and safety programs. They also might consult with engineers or physicians.

Specialists monitor safety measurements in order to advise management of safety performance to correct existing safety hazards and to avoid future hazards; they write reports, including accident reports, and enter information on Occupational Safety and Health Administration recordkeeping forms. They also may prepare documents used in legal proceedings and give testimony in court.

## EDUCATION REQUIRED

Most employers require occupational health and safety specialists to have a bachelor's degree in occupational health, safety, or a related field, such as engineering, biology, or chemistry. For some positions, a master's degree in industrial hygiene, health physics, or a related subject is required. High school students interested in enrolling in a college program should complete courses in English, mathematics, chemistry, biology, and physics. College courses may include radiation science, hazardous material management and control, risk communications, principles of ergonomics, and respiratory protection. Course work will vary depending on the degree pursued. For example, course requirements for students seeking a degree in industrial hygiene will differ from course requirements for health physics degree seekers.

In order to become credentialed, most accrediting bodies require that specialists have attended either a regional or nationally accredited educational institution. Work experience is important in this occupation; it is typically beneficial for prospective students to select an education program that offers opportunities to complete internships.

All occupational health and safety specialists are trained in the applicable laws or inspection procedures through some combination of classroom and on-the-job training.

## Occupational Health and Safety Specialists - Continued

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### OTHER USEFUL SKILLS

Credentialing is voluntary, although many employers encourage it. Credentialing is available through several organizations depending on the specialists' field of work. Organizations credentialing health and safety professionals include the American Board of Health Physicists; the American Indoor Air Quality Council; the American Board of Industrial Hygiene; and the Board of Certified Safety Professionals.

Requirements for credentials vary. Most require specific education and experience in order to be eligible to sit for the certification exam. Once certified, specialists are usually required to complete periodic continuing education for recertification. For information on credentials offered and requirements contact the credentialing organization.

People interested in this occupation should be responsible and enjoy detailed work. Occupational health and safety specialists also should be able to communicate well. Work experience as an occupational health and safety professional may also be a prerequisite for many positions.

### HOW TO ADVANCE

Occupational health and safety specialists who work for the Federal Government advance through their career ladder to a specified full-performance level if their work is satisfactory. For positions above this level, usually supervisory positions, advancement is competitive and based on agency needs and individual merit. Advancement opportunities in State and local governments and the private sector are often similar to those in the Federal Government.

### WORK ENVIRONMENT

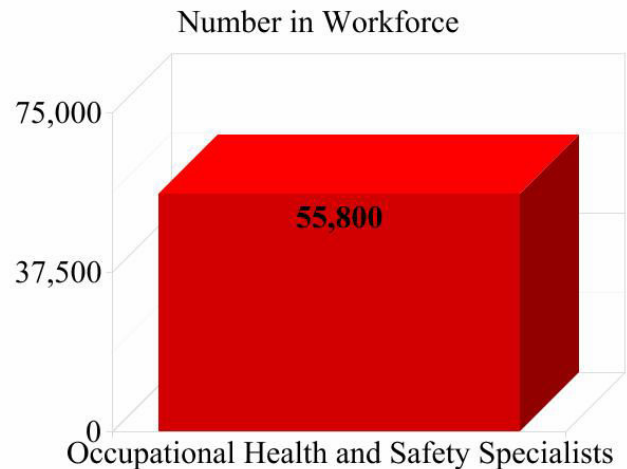
Occupational health and safety specialists work in a variety of settings such as offices, factories, and mines. Their jobs often involve considerable fieldwork and travel.

Occupational health and safety specialists may be exposed to many of the same strenuous, dangerous, or stressful conditions faced by industrial employees. The majority of occupational health and safety specialist work the typical 40 hour week. Some specialists may work over-time, and often irregular, hours.

### JOB GROWTH

Employment of occupational health and safety specialists is expected to increase 11 percent during the 2008-18 decade, about as fast as the average for all occupations, reflecting a balance of continuing public demand for a safe and healthy work environment against the desire for fewer government regulations.

More specialists will be needed to cope with technological advances in safety equipment and threats, changing regulations, and increasing public expectations. In private industry, employment growth will reflect continuing self-enforcement of government and company regulations and policies.



Insurance and worker's compensation costs have become a financial concern for many employers and insurance companies. As a result, job growth should be good for those specializing in loss prevention, especially in construction safety and in ergonomics.

Growth for occupational health and safety specialists may be hampered by the number of manufacturing and other industry firms offshoring their operations. In addition, the number of workers who telecommute is increasing. Since occupational health and safety specialists do not have access to home offices, their ability to ensure health and safety of workers in home offices is limited.

As the lines continue to blur between specific health and safety specialties like industrial hygiene, health physics, and loss prevention, individuals with a well-rounded breadth of knowledge in more than one health and safety specialty will have the best job prospects.