

Landscapes

Published by **FORED BC** Est. 1925

Volume V Spring 1999

ENVIRONMENTAL

What is the environmental industry? If the question is put to a small group of spin-doctors who have fought losing battles with environmental activists, they might define the environmental industry as "a busload of eco-freaks and their media groupies." A more reliable definition could be obtained from the Canadian Council for Human Resources in the Environment Industry (CCHREI). The Council describes Canada's environmental industry as one made up of 4,700 companies and organizations collectively employing 150,000 workers and generating \$11 billion a year in revenues. About 12 per cent of those revenues are earned in British Columbia, but the province provides 21 per cent of all environmental jobs in Canada – a ratio higher than BC's percentage of the Canadian population. According to CCHREI statistics, Alberta has the highest per-capita

The largest portion of all jobs...are found in protection of air, water and land.

participation in terms of environmental jobs, providing 24 per cent of the national employment in the field.

What exactly is meant by an environmental job? The Council uses three working definitions in looking at the 150,000 jobs across the country. A job that is "completely environmental" is one where most of the functions are directly related to environmental protection and resource conservation. About 63 per cent of all environmental jobs fall under this category. The second category is a job that is "half environmental", meaning half of the job functions are environment-related. This portion accounts for 22 per cent of the jobs. The remaining portion, 15 per cent, are those jobs that are "slightly environmental", meaning a small fraction of the job functions are connected to the environment and conservation.

Once the jobs are defined, they are grouped into three broad categories. The first, *Environmental Protection*, pertains to jobs in such areas as air quality, and human and

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Careers... in clean water

...in clean air

...in healthy forests

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Publication Agreement No 1484214



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environmental health. The second sector, entitled *Conservation and Preservation*, includes fields such as fisheries and wildlife, forestry and mining. The third sector is *Environmental*

Education and Communications. This section covers occupations including teaching, communications and research.

Each of these sectors, in turn, is divided into a field of 17 occupational classifications. These include diverse areas including chemistry, physics, architecture, engineering and recreation. Knowing how jobs are grouped and classified is part of the process. What's most important to students and job seekers is where to find those jobs. A national survey of job competitions conducted by CCHREI over the past five years shows who is hiring.

Over half of the environmental jobs in Canada are found in business, divided between consulting and manufacturing firms on one side, and private sector industries on the other. The three levels of government account for an equal share of one-third of the environmental jobs in Canada, with universities, colleges and associations representing the rest.

The same survey provides some interesting glimpses into the types of jobs offered by all employers surveyed. The largest portion of all jobs, 28 per cent, are found in protection of air, water and land. Among industries, mining and energy provide 11 per cent of the jobs, with nine per cent coming from forestry. Total jobs in environmental communications and education equal seven per cent of all employment compared to four per cent for parks and outdoor recreation.

Perhaps the most important message in the Council's research is that if young people really want to do something about the environment, the most important thing they can do is stay in school. The research shows that 70 per cent of all environmental jobs require a university degree, and a further 21 per cent require either a degree or technician/technology diploma. The remaining nine per cent require a college diploma or certificate. In short, environmental careers represent one of the fastest-growing areas of job opportunities in Canada, but there is a "no help wanted" sign for those who end their education at the secondary school level.

What types of graduates are being hired for environmental jobs in



BC? While graduates from engineering disciplines continue to take over 20 per cent of the new vacancies, other fields are close behind, including biology, forestry and information technology. The environmental sector also offers career opportunities in social sciences, law and business administration.

In an industry that's less than 20 years old, there are bound to be issues and challenges in matching people and opportunities. The Council has identified a top list of issues to be addressed in order that Canada can reach its potential in this sector. Among these are:

- a lack of communication between the environmental industry and educators
- declining enrolment in science and engineering programs
- the need for highly developed communication skills in all disciplines

In a field that requires continuous educational upgrading, the Council sees some key challenges in people development. These include:

- identifying the needs and trends in industry
- raising public awareness of environmental careers
- improving information-sharing on the course and program content in education

...a lack of communication between the environmental industry and educators.

In less than 40 years, environmentalism has progressed from being an obscure area of studies for a handful of concerned academics, to a lucrative opportunity for executive recruiting firms. With more than \$5 billion in environment industry exports reported last year, according to the environment industry's association, it may become the most promising area of economic and career opportunity in the next decade, and offer Canada a unique place for world leadership.



ABOUT CCHREI...

The Council was established to ensure an adequate supply of people with the skills and knowledge required to meet the environmental human resources needs of the public and private sector. The group gathers labour market information, develops human resources policy, as well as employment standards in the environmental field.

Among the key operating strategies of the Council are:

- a continuing effort to define and classify environmental occupations and employment sectors
- programs to promote youth employment and career awareness
- to act as an information clearinghouse for environmental education and training

Landscapes

Landscapes is published quarterly by Forest Education BC (*FORED*) and circulated free-of-charge to members, educators and all BC schools. A \$40 subscription to *Landscapes* entitles readers to membership in the organization. *FORED* is a non-profit, non-partisan environmental education association that brings the environment to the classroom.

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From The Readers

Since the fall 1998 edition of *Landscapes*, we've received a number of responses from our readers. Here is an excerpt from one of these letters:

"Please accept our thanks for the rich opportunity afforded to the teachers of our district in your recent environmental education workshop. We look forward to the special report in the next issue of *Landscapes*."

– Chris Kelly, Superintendent of Schools, Richmond School District