Career Outlook

Water work: Jobs related to water utilities

Elka Torpey | April 2017

More than 70 percent of the earth's surface is covered in it.

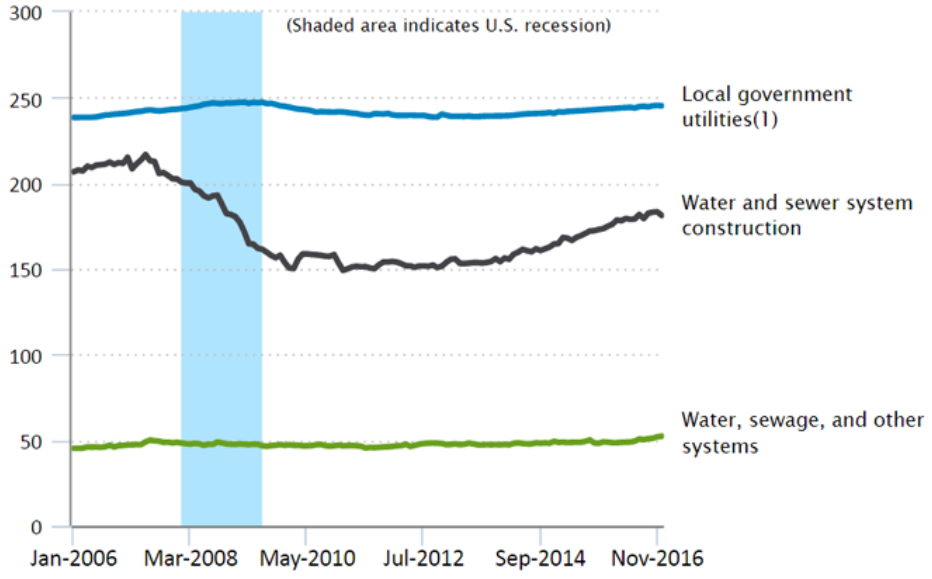
We use most of it for purposes other than drinking.

We need it to survive.

It's water, of course. But less than 1 percent of this essential compound is accessible for our consumption. We rely on workers in water and wastewater treatment to keep the supply we do have clean and safe—and available to us.

Industries related to water utilities include local government utilities; water, sewage, and other systems; and water and sewer system construction. As chart 1 shows, employment in local government utilities and water, sewage, and other systems has been relatively stable over the past decade. Water and sewer system construction employment, like construction employment as a whole, has fluctuated.

Chart 1. Employment in selected water-related industries, 2006–16 (thousands)



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Employment Statistics survey, seasonally adjusted.
(1) Includes water and energy utilities.

These industries employ workers in a variety of jobs, including those in:

- management and supervision;
- design and construction;
- operations and maintenance; and
- office and administrative support.

As table 1 shows, compared with all occupations, many of the selected occupations offer either higher pay or better job prospects, or both. And you can enter most of the occupations shown in the table with a high school diploma and on-the-job training.

Table 1. Selected occupations related to water utilities

Median hourly wages, projected employment growth, and typical education and training, all industries

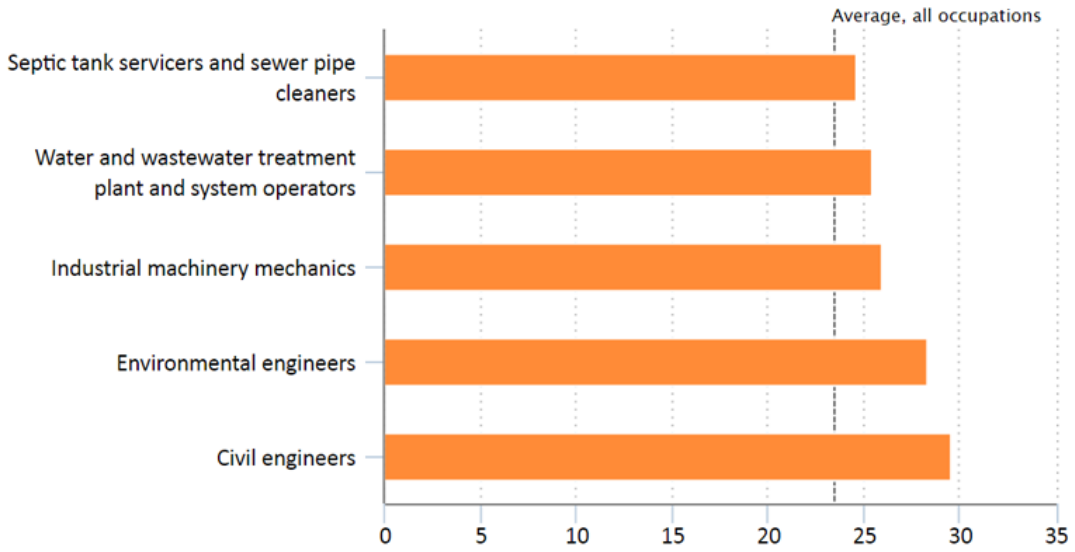
	General and operations managers	First-line supervisors of production and operating workers	Pipelayers	Plumbers, pipefitters, and steamfitters	Water and wastewater treatment plant and system operators
Median hourly wage, all industries, 2016	$47.74	$27.78	$18.47	$24.74	$22.00
Employment growth, all industries, projected 2014-24 (percent)	7.1	-3.1	11.4	11.5	6.0
Education	Bachelor's degree	High school diploma or equivalent	No formal educational credential	High school diploma or equivalent	High school diploma or equivalent
Work experience in a related occupation	5 years or more	Less than 5 years	None	None	None
On-the-job training	None	None	Short-term on-the-job training	Apprenticeship	Long-term on-the-job training

	Construction equipment operators	Utilities meter readers	General maintenance and repair workers	Construction laborers	All occupations
Median hourly wage, all industries, 2016	$21.65	$18.72	$17.76	$16.07	$17.81
Employment growth, all industries, projected 2014-24 (percent)	10.2	-18.0	6.1	12.7	6.5
Education	High school diploma or equivalent	High school diploma or equivalent	High school diploma or equivalent	No formal educational credential	
Work experience in a related occupation	None	None	None	None	
On-the-job training	Moderate-term on-the-job training	Short-term on-the-job training	Long-term on-the-job training	Short-term on-the-job training	

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics program (wages) and Employment Projections program (projections, education, experience, training).

In addition to opportunities arising from growth, opportunities are expected from the need to replace workers who leave these occupations permanently. Chart 2 shows selected occupations related to water and wastewater treatment that the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projects to have higher-than-average replacement rates through 2024.

Chart 2. Selected water-related occupations with above-average replacement rates in all industries, projected 2014–24



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Learn more about these and other occupations in the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*. Detailed industry and occupation projections are available from the Employment Projections program.

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