

Crane Operator

Lift steel, concrete and machinery on construction sites. A licensed trade with high pay and enormous responsibility.

TYPICAL PAY

\$85,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$60k to \$120k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

3 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Construction sites, condo towers, refineries, ports

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma and a driver's licence** Grade 12
 Grade 12 with math and physics. Mobile cranes drive on the road, so you will need a DZ (truck and air brake) licence in Ontario or the equivalent elsewhere.
- 2 Get on a crew** Months to a year
 Start as a rigger, oiler or swamper with a crane rental company, a builder or through the union hall. This is where sponsors find you.
- 3 Register the apprenticeship** Days
 In Ontario, with Skilled Trades Ontario under the Hoisting Engineer trade. In Alberta, with Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training. In BC, through SkilledTradesBC and BC Crane Safety.
- 4 Work and study** 1 to 3 years
 Mobile Crane Operator 1 in Ontario is 6,000 hours: 5,520 on the job plus 480 in class. Tower Crane Operator is 3,000 hours and Mobile Crane Operator 2 is 1,000.
- 5 Certificate of Qualification and Red Seal** After your hours
 Pass the provincial exam. Mobile Crane Operator and Tower Crane Operator are both Red Seal trades.

Pros and cons

- + Among the best-paid construction trades
- + Licensed, so untrained people cannot undercut you
- + Strong union with hiring hall and pension
- Extreme responsibility: a mistake can kill someone
- Long hours alone in a cab, sometimes 12 or more a day
- Tower cranes: heights, weather and no easy bathroom

Good to know

Toronto is one of the busiest crane cities in North America

Industry crane-count surveys have had Toronto near the top of the continent for years because of its condo building boom. Each of those cranes needs a licensed operator.

The union runs its own crane school

IUOE Local 793 (the Ontario operating engineers' union) trains apprentices on real cranes and machines at OETIO (Operating Engineers Training Institute of Ontario), its own institute with campus...

Optional boosts

Tower Crane Operator licence. Mobile Crane Operator 1. Rigging certification. Boom truck and concrete pump.

Where these numbers come from

Job Bank: Crane operators, wages (updated Nov 2025)

Red Seal Program: Mobile Crane Operator

Red Seal Program: Tower Crane Operator

Skilled Trades Ontario

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in Canadian dollars, based on Government of Canada Job Bank wage data and published salary grids. They vary by province, employer and experience. Tuition is for domestic students. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/ca/careers/crane-operator>



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