

Heavy Equipment Operator

Run excavators, dozers and graders that move earth for roads, pipelines and buildings. A short training path and good pay, but seasonal.

TYPICAL PAY

\$65,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$45k to \$95k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 2 years

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Road and highway sites, subdivisions, mines, pipelines

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma and a driver's licence** Grade 12
 Grade 12. A clean driving record matters. A DZ (truck and air brake) licence helps because operators often float their own machine to site.
- 2 Get on a crew** Months
 Start as a labourer with a road builder, excavation company or municipality, or apply to the union hall. Seat time is earned by showing up and being trusted.
- 3 Train** 1 to 2 years
 Either register an apprenticeship with your provincial trades authority (Ontario's dozer, excavator and tractor-loader-backhoe apprenticeships are each about 2,560 hours, roughly a year and a half), or take a private course of 4 to 12 weeks and learn the rest on the j...
- 4 Certify** After your hours
 Heavy Equipment Operator (Dozer), (Excavator) and (Tractor-Loader-Backhoe) are each Red Seal trades. Certification is optional but it opens union and government jobs.

Pros and cons

- + Quickest route to good pay of any construction trade
- + Sitting down, not on your knees
- + Strong union presence in road and civil work
- Seasonal: many operators are laid off part of the winter
- Long days, early starts and time away from home
- Buried utilities and trenches are dangerous

Good to know

Three Red Seal trades in one

Red Seal treats dozer, excavator and tractor-loader-backhoe as separate trades. Many operators hold one and learn the others on the job.

The machine knows where the ground should be

GPS (satellite positioning) and 3D design models now guide the blade or bucket to within a few centimetres. Operators who used to read stakes now read screens, and companies fight over the ones who ca...

Optional boosts

Grader operator. GPS machine control. Mining haul truck and shovel. Pipeline sideboom and rock truck.

Where these numbers come from

Job Bank: Heavy equipment operators, wages (updated Nov 2025)
 Red Seal Program: Heavy Equipment Operator (Excavator)
 Skilled Trades Ontario
 IUOE Local 793 (Operating Engineers, 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/heavy-equipment-operator>



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