

Oil Rig Worker

Start as a floorhand with no experience and climb to driller. Big money in 12-hour shifts, and no work when the rigs shut down.

TYPICAL PAY

\$83,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$52k to \$98k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 1 year

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Drilling and service rigs in Alberta, Saskatchewan and northeast BC,...

How you get there

1 High school

Grade 12

A diploma is expected but the real requirements are a driver's licence, a clean drug test and being fit enough for heavy work. You must be 18.

2 Safety tickets

1 week

H2S Alive (hydrogen sulphide gas safety), standard first aid and a general safety orientation from Energy Safety Canada or a similar provider. A few days of courses.

3 Leasehand, then floorhand

6 to 18 months

The bottom of the crew: cleaning, moving pipe, tripping drill string on the floor. Job Bank says most contractors want about a year as a floorhand before promotion.

4 Motorhand, then derrickhand

1 to 3 years

Motorhand runs the engines and pumps. Derrickhand works up the mast handling pipe and looks after the mud system. Some employers require rig technician certification for these jobs.

5 Driller

3 to 5 years in

Runs the rig floor and the crew. Rig manager after that.

Pros and cons

- + Hired with no experience and no debt
- + Six figures possible within a few years
- + Clear ladder: floorhand to driller to rig manager
- Boom and bust: layoffs every spring and every price crash
- Dangerous, heavy work in extreme cold
- Weeks away from home in camps

Optional boosts

Rig technician certification. Well control and blowout prevention. Service rigs and well testing. Rig manager.

Where these numbers come from

Job Bank: Rig technicians, oil and gas well drillers and servicers, wages (updated Nov 2025)

Job Bank: Rig technicians, job requirements and regulation

Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training: Rig Technician course outline (2011)

Energy Safety Canada (safety training for the energy industry)

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/oil-rig-worker>

Good to know

Hundreds of rigs, tens of thousands of jobs

The Canadian Association of Energy Contractors says its members run 336 land drilling rigs and 668 service rigs, supporting more than 80,000 direct and indirect jobs across the country.

The crew has its own language

Leasehand, floorhand, motorhand, derrickhand, driller. Each name is a job on the rig, and each one is a promotion. Old-timers still say roughneck for anyone on the floor.



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