

Environmental Engineer

Design the systems that keep water drinkable, air breathable and contaminated ground safe. Four years of school, then a license.

TYPICAL PAY

\$107,110

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$70k to \$162k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

4 to 8 years

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

**Engineering consulting firms,
government agencies, water and...**

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grades 11 and 12
Calculus, chemistry and physics. Engineering programs assume all three and admission is based on them.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Environmental engineering, or civil engineering with an environmental focus. Make sure the program is accredited for engineering, not engineering technology.
- 3 Fundamentals of Engineering (FE) exam** Final year
Taken near graduation. Passing makes you an engineer in training, which is the first half of licensure.
- 4 Work under a licensed engineer** 4 years
Usually four years of documented, supervised experience at a consulting firm, an agency or a utility.
- 5 Principles and Practice of Engineering (PE) exam and state license** After the experience
Pass the environmental discipline exam and apply to your state board. Then you can seal your own work.

Pros and cons

- + Four years of school for close to six figures within a few years
- + Work that visibly matters: drinking water, clean air, cleaned-up land
- + Employers in every state, in both the private and public sector
- The degree is hard and the first two years wash a lot of people out
- Regulation and politics change the work, sometimes overnight
- More report writing and permitting than most people expect

Optional boosts

Water and wastewater treatment. Contaminated site cleanup. Air quality and permitting. Stormwater and flooding.

Good to know

The job was created by two laws

The Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act set limits that somebody has to actually meet, and meeting them takes designed systems. Nearly every environmental engineering job in the country traces back...

Sewage treatment is farming bacteria

A wastewater plant works by keeping billions of microorganisms alive in tanks and feeding them the waste. The engineer's job is to give those microbes the right oxygen, temperature and time. Get it wrong...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Environmental Engineers (17-2081.00)
National Council of Examiners for Engineering and Surveying: engineering exams
ABET, the accreditor for engineering and technology degree programs
United States Environmental Protection Agency: careers

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/environmental-engineer>



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