

Environmental Scientist

Find out what is in the air, water and soil, then write the report that makes somebody deal with it.

TYPICAL PAY

\$82,220

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$53k to \$140k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

4 to 6 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

**Consulting firms, state agencies,
federal agencies, industry**

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
Chemistry, biology and as much math as you can stand. A summer outdoors job helps more than it sounds.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Environmental science, geology, chemistry, biology or environmental engineering. Two years at a community college then transferring is the cheap route and employers do not care.
- 3 Field and lab experience** During the degree
Summer internships, a state agency co-op or a professor's research project. Hiring managers look at this before they look at your grades.
- 4 Entry job** 2 to 4 years
Staff scientist or field technician at a consulting firm or agency. You learn sampling protocol, chain of custody and how permits are written.
- 5 Master's degree or a credential** 2 years, often part time
Optional, but it is how most people move from collecting data to running projects. Many employers pay for it.

Pros and cons

- + Outdoors and indoors in the same job
- + Four years of school and no licensing exam to start
- + Work that visibly cleans something up
- The first few years are cold, wet and repetitive
- Consulting means billable hours and pressure to hit them
- Much of the work is paid for by the industry being checked

Good to know

The writing matters more than the sampling

Most of the value of this job is in the report. A perfect set of samples with a report nobody can act on changes nothing, and the people who get promoted fastest are the ones who write clearly.

There are more than 1,300 Superfund sites

The federal government keeps a National Priorities List of the country's worst contaminated sites, and it has held more than 1,300 for years. Each one needs sampling, monitoring and reporting for dec...

Optional boosts

Registered environmental health specialist. Professional geologist license. Hazardous waste operations training. Mapping software.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Environmental Scientists and Specialists, Including Health (19-2041.00)

National Environmental Health Association: credentials

State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry: environmental science

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-scientist>



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