

Oil Rig Worker

Hard physical work on a drilling or well service rig, two weeks on and two weeks off. No degree needed, and the risk is real.

TYPICAL PAY

\$58,160

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$39k to \$98k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 1 year

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Land rigs, offshore platforms, well sites, service trucks

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
Usual but not always required. Shop, welding and math classes help. So does anything that proves you show up on time.
- 2 Safety tickets and a medical** Days to weeks
A rig safety orientation, hydrogen sulfide awareness, first aid and a drug test. Some are done in a day, some the employer pays for on hire.
- 3 Get hired as a roustabout or floorhand** Immediate
The bottom of the crew: moving pipe, cleaning, handling tools, doing what the driller says. Go to where the rigs are and apply in person.
- 4 Work up the crew** 3 to 8 years
Floorhand to motorhand to derrickhand to driller. Each step is more skill, more responsibility and more money, learned on the job.
- 5 Well control certification** Before you run the floor
Drillers and supervisors need certified well control training, for example the WellSharp program run by IADC (the International Association of Drilling Contractors), renewed every two years.

Pros and cons

- + Good money at eighteen with no tuition and no debt
- + Half the year off on a two weeks on, two weeks off rotation
- + Promotion is on ability, not on paper qualifications
- Oil and gas extraction has one of the highest workplace death rates of any American industry
- The work vanishes when the oil price falls, and layoffs come fast
- Twelve-hour shifts wreck sleep, knees, backs and hands

Optional boosts

Well control certification. CDL (commercial driver's license). Welding. Crane and rigging certification.

Good to know

The rig never sleeps

Drilling runs 24 hours a day because stopping is expensive and dangerous. Crews work in shifts the industry still calls tours, pronounced towers, and two crews hand the rig back and forth witho...

One blowout rewrote the rules

The Deepwater Horizon rig exploded in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, killing eleven workers and spilling oil for months. The federal offshore regulator was broken up and rebuilt afterwards, which is why the Bur...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Service Unit Operators, Oil and Gas (47-5013.00)
International Association of Drilling Contractors
Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement
Apprenticeship.gov, the United States Department of Labor apprenticeship site

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/oil-rig-worker>



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