



Hazardous and Decontamination Technicians

Talk about an unenviable job! We know that not all of us can land our dreams jobs. Certain “dangerous” jobs have to be done and those who do these high-risk jobs are extremely important in trying to maintain a safe environment for all of us to live in. Hazardous and decontamination technicians are responsible for removing toxic materials from a given location and transporting them to another location for disposal. Our society is moving forward in eliminating hazardous materials more efficiently and effectively to ensure our health and safety for future generations to come.

There are specific types of hazardous and decontamination workers who specialize in an area, such as [emergency and disaster response workers](#), treatment/storage/disposal workers, [radiation protection technicians](#), decontamination technicians, and [asbestos abatement workers](#). Each occupation represents a different responsibility and duty in the hazardous material industry.

- Emergency and disaster response workers exactly respond to emergencies that are created by hazardous materials. Accidents can occur at any given time, at any stage of cleaning, removing, and transporting hazardous materials. Emergency and disaster response workers have to act quickly and effectively to ensure the materials do not spread and cause serious damage to the environment and people in the surrounding.
- [Treatment/storage/disposal workers](#) have a great responsibility because they have to deal with many aspects of hazardous materials and not just decontamination. These types of workers must treat the hazardous materials, store them in proper facilities, and dispose them in the correct manner, which requires these workers to follow certain laws and guidelines. Those laws and guidelines are governed by the US Environmental Protection Agency and Occupational Safety and Health Administration. For example, the US Environmental Protection Agency administers a variety of acts which include Atomic Energy Act, Nuclear Waste Policy Act, and Toxic Substances Control Act which are all related to hazardous and decontamination policies.
- Radiation protection technicians mainly handle radiation-related materials by evaluating areas for radiation, treatment, and disposal. Being a highly complex technician position, only those who have experience may become radiation protection technicians.
- Decontamination technicians clean radioactive materials on site. With the dangerous nature of radiation, many of these decontamination jobs are being done by man-operated robots. We all know exposure to high levels of radiation can be fatal. For example, a decontamination robot may be used in a nuclear power plant by using a washing mechanism and vacuum unit. Many of such robots are being built and tested at the National Institute of Standards and Technology.
- Asbestos abatement workers are needed to remove those types of hazardous materials that can be found in nearly every building. Asbestos is a mineral fiber that can be inhaled causing serious damage such as lung and abdominal cancers to internal organs with continuous exposure. Old buildings may develop asbestos in shingles, floor tiles, inside the walls, and pipes. The Asbestos Hazard Emergency Act requires all those who are involved with removal of asbestos to have the proper training and education. Those who wish to enter the asbestos field must receive their training from an accredited institution in their state.
- Lead abatement workers are also needed to remove this potentially hazardous material. High exposure to lead-based materials such as paint and water can cause central nervous systems problems, hypotension, hearing loss, fatigue, nausea, headaches, constipation, muscle aches, vomiting, loss of appetite, and even death from long-term exposure. When typically removing lead from an area, a lead abatement worker will use sandpaper, scrapers, chemicals, and heat-guns. Removing lead from a home should be done by a qualified lead abatement worker because self-removal of lead can cause the debris to spread through the air.

The training for hazardous and decontamination workers varies depending on the type of occupation. Most of the training is done on the job. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission provides training and education for those who are interested in a hazardous and decontamination career.



Career Tips

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration provides regulations for license for emergency disaster response and treatment/storage/disposal workers.

Currently, there are around 40,000 hazardous and decontamination technicians and that number is expected to increase over the next decade. With increasingly growing concerns on storing and disposal of hazardous waste, leading companies are more consciously aware of their waste materials. Hazardous and decontamination workers can make

anywhere between \$14 and \$23 per hour.

Typically those in the hazardous and decontamination industry work a standard 40 hour per week. During emergencies, these hours would increase. Workers can work any time of the day depending on the nature of the job because hazardous materials need to be taken care of as soon as possible, at any time. The nature of the work may lead to stress and fatigue. These are not pretty jobs but they are extremely necessary to protect us from potentially catastrophic dangers.

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