

<b>Environmental Health Officer</b>		<b>New South Wales (NSW)</b>
<b>ASCO Code:</b> 2543-13	March 2007	
<b>Labour market rating</b>	Recruitment difficulty (regional)	
<b>Comment:</b> <i>Recruitment difficulties are most pronounced in regional councils.</i>		

### **Occupational demand**

A large majority of environmental health officers are employed in local government and demand for the occupation mainly depends on local government budgets and spending priorities. While the underlying demand for environmental health services has increased in recent years with the growth in economic activity, this has been offset by council amalgamations, strategic alliances between councils and the outsourcing of some environmental health services. Discussions with local government employers conducted for this report suggest that their overall employment of environmental health officers has been stable over the last year, with most vacancies arising due to turnover of existing staff.

### **Occupational supply**

Supply to this occupation from formal courses has fallen in recent years. Completions from relevant degree courses averaged 30 a year from 2003 to 2006 which was a 30 per cent decline on the average for the previous four years. TAFE graduated 15 to 20 students a year from a Diploma in Environmental Health and Building Surveying but this course was discontinued in 2005. Immigration is unlikely to be an important source of supply to the occupation due to the need for knowledge of local occupational health legislation and standards. Data from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship indicate that the combined net immigration of environmental health professionals and occupational health and safety professionals averaged 18 persons per year in the past five years.

### **Employer and industry comments/current labour market**

A DEEWR survey of employers who had recently advertised for environmental health officers showed that 90 per cent of surveyed vacancies were filled within six weeks of advertising. While there was an average of eight applicants per vacancy and over two suitable applicants per vacancy, the recruitment experience of employers varied considerably. Sydney employers generally had less difficulty filling vacancies than those based in regional NSW. All the surveyed vacancies in Sydney were filled and the majority attracted several suitable applicants from whom the employer could choose. Positions based in regional NSW generally attracted fewer applicants and a small number remained unfilled. Employers in regional NSW commented that the difficulty filling such vacancies arose because there was only one training provider based in Sydney and also because many regional councils combined the roles of environmental health officer and building surveyor and thus required a broader range of skills and experience from applicants. Some employers had recruited staff with related qualifications and experience (such as environmental science) due to the difficulty in finding applicants with formal qualifications in environmental health. Others had contracted out part of their environmental health functions (for example, the inspection of food premises) to private providers. A significant proportion of employers contacted for this report had recently recruited cadets and trainees in environmental health due to the lack of experienced persons in the local labour market.

### **Labour market outlook**

Demand for this occupation is likely to grow only moderately at best over the short term due to continuing constraints in local government budgets. However, as supply to the occupation from graduations is not expected to increase significantly before late 2007, some recruitment difficulties should persist in regional NSW.