

<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.

<b>Environmental Health Officer</b>		<b>Victoria</b>
<b>ASCO Code:</b> 2543-13	February 2007	
<b>Labour market rating</b>	Recruitment Difficulty	
<b>Comment:</b> <i>Recruitment difficulties restricted to vacancies requiring tertiary qualifications.</i>		

### **Occupational demand**

Demand for environmental health officers is broadly determined by the general state of the economy and population growth. Victoria's economy has grown by an average of 3.2 per cent over the four years to 2005-06 and the population grew by 1.3 per cent over 2006. Growing public awareness of environmental issues is also influencing the level of demand. However, demand is primarily determined by the amount of health-related legislation as the occupation is concentrated in government agencies responsible for regulatory compliance. Legislation, such as the *Food Act 1984* (recently amended in October 2006), requires that 'authorised officers' conduct compliance and other duties prescribed by the legislation. There is also a small level of private sector demand in the areas of environmental and food safety auditing/management. DEEWR Skilled Vacancies Index data suggests that demand for environmental health officers fell moderately between 2000 and 2005 however vacancies have remained relatively stable over the last year.

### **Occupational supply**

ABS Education and Work figures suggest around 60 per cent of employed environmental and occupational health and safety professionals have bachelor degrees. DEEWR estimates the number of persons who completed tertiary education in the field of health surveying and environmental health increased approximately 15 per cent in 2004 from 2003 completions. Supply to the profession from net immigration has significantly increased from last year, contributing around 17 occupational and environmental health professionals in 2005-06.

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

The Survey of Employers who Recently Advertised (SERA) found almost two thirds of vacancies were filled. The average number of suitable applicants per vacancy was 1.1 and the average the number of unsuitable applicants was 4.2 per vacancy. Many advertised vacancies were listed by local Victorian councils and other public sector agencies with only a small number being advertised by the private sector. Many public sector employers commented that it was becoming more difficult to employ environmental health officers due to the competitive remuneration packages offered by private sector employers. This is due to increased private sector interest in the occupation. Employers in regional Victoria cited further difficulties in their recruitment process as taking the position would require a considerable lifestyle change for potential metropolitan based candidates. Regional employers also felt that the drought and bushfires occurring in regional Victoria was deterring people from relocating, rather encouraging them to stay in metropolitan areas. To attract and retain candidates employers were providing in-house training packages. Some of the employer's surveyed were seeking tertiary qualifications and industry experience and this was the main reason these employers found candidates unsuitable. Generally employers described the occupational turnover as relatively low. However, local council employers reported they are finding it difficult to retain staff because of other competitive markets, such as mining.

### **Labour market outlook**

The relatively balanced labour market for environmental health officers in Victoria is expected to continue over the next six months, with recruitment difficulties persisting for vacancies requiring tertiary qualifications.

<b>Environmental Health Officer</b>		<b>Queensland</b>
<b>ASCO Code:</b> 2543-13	February 2007	
<b>Labour market rating</b>	Shortage	
<b>Comment:</b>		

### **Occupational demand**

Environmental health officers develop, monitor and enforce laws and regulations governing public health standards and environmental management in order to promote good health, hygiene and environmental practices. Local government is the most significant employer of environmental health officers in Queensland, but they are also employed by the State's health and environmental departments and area health services, the Australian Defence Force, major food processing and service companies, and elsewhere in the private sector. Demand has grown in Queensland over recent years due to the State's expanding population and industrial development, and in line with growing community expectations.

### **Occupational supply**

Formal education for this profession in Queensland is through a three year undergraduate degree offered at Griffith University, or a combined three year undergraduate degree in a relevant field and a twelve month Graduate Diploma available at the Queensland University of Technology. Students can study full time, part time or externally, with almost half of the current students studying externally while living in regional locations, according to university contacts. Data from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations show that annual enrolments for environmental health officers have gradually declined since 2003 while wastage from these courses is high, at around 50 per cent. Consequently, about 40 graduates each year, on average, have entered the labour market over the last few years. Department of Immigration and Citizenship figures show a net permanent and long term gain to the State of 24 self-identified occupational and environmental health professionals in 2005-06.

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

About 53 per cent of the vacancies included in this year's survey were filled within six weeks of advertising, and less than one third of applicants were considered to be suitable. Most employers said they had to advertise multiple times and used a variety of methods to recruit suitable workers. According to employer and agency contacts, the majority of applicants lacked general experience or specific knowledge of Queensland environmental legislation. Some contacts said that higher wages available elsewhere both attract workers away from Queensland and act as a disincentive to potential migrants to the State. Survey respondents indicated that moderate staff turnover in all locations, and the subsequent need for replacement staff, have contributed significantly to demand. Employers in regional areas reported higher levels of turnover, with the average length of stay of an employee being 24 months or less. It was suggested by some contacts that it is difficult to attract workers to regional areas, even with the offer of attractive remuneration.

### **Labour market outlook**

With levels of industry development and government health activity expected to increase and the State's population continuing to grow, demand for environmental health officers should continue to expand over the next few years. At the same time, the supply of suitably qualified professionals from all sources will remain limited, especially in regional areas. The present State-wide shortage is therefore expected to continue over at least the coming year.

<b>Environmental Health Officer</b>		<b>South Australia</b>
<b>ASCO Code:</b> 2543-13	January 2007	
<b>Labour market rating</b>	No Shortage	
<b>Comment</b>		

### **Occupational demand**

Environmental health officers work mainly in the public sector, with a significant proportion employed in local government councils. Occupational demand may be affected by government spending on public health, changes to legislation relating to health matters, and public awareness and demand for action on environmental issues. Anecdotal evidence suggests recent demand for environmental health officers has been confined to replacing staff who have resigned or changed jobs, although overall turnover rates within the occupation are considered to be low. DEEWR's Skilled Vacancies Index data indicate that demand for the broader category of occupational and environmental health officers remained reasonably stable over the twelve months to January 2007. A 2004 industry review of the environmental health officer (EHO) workforce raised concerns over the ageing EHO workforce, noting that wastage would be a prime demand determinant in future years.

### **Occupational supply**

Entry into the occupation is usually achieved by completing a degree in science or applied science, with a major in environmental health. Flinders University offers a Bachelor of Environmental Health over three years full time or equivalent, and this is the major source of new supply in SA. The number of students commencing this course is in decline, with commencements falling 46 per cent over the three years to 2006, compared with the previous three years. The number of completions has fluctuated from year to year, with 9 in 2003, 26 in 2004 and 14 in 2005. Around 20 students were expected to graduate in 2006, while completions are likely to be significantly lower in 2007. Skilled migration increased in 2005-06, with a net supply of 13 environmental health officers, compared to zero in 2004-05.

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

A survey of employers who had recently advertised for environmental health officers showed that 100 per cent of vacancies were filled within six weeks of advertising. The survey sample included a small number of both Adelaide-based and regional South Australian vacancies. Each vacancy attracted an average of 16 applicants, while there were 6 suitable applicants per vacancy. Overall, the general standard of applicants was considered satisfactory and there were no reports of recruitment difficulty. One employer indicated it was a challenge recruiting temporary EHOs during periods of peak workload, while retention of workers in regional areas of the State was also an issue. The ageing workforce was a further concern for some councils, suggesting recruitment difficulties could emerge in the not too distant future as more experienced workers retire. However, despite these issues, employers were able to source workers with appropriate qualifications and experience when required and the high vacancy fill rate supports a current labour market rating of 'no shortage'.

### **Labour market outlook**

The number of commencing students has been in decline and therefore the number of university completions is also likely to trend downwards. At the same time, the environmental health officer workforce has a higher age profile than the average for all South Australian occupations and occupational wastage is expected to be the major stimulus for demand in the short to medium term. Lower supply and escalating demand could potentially result in recruitment difficulties emerging over the same period.

<b>Environmental Health Officer</b>		<b>Western Australia</b>
ASCO Code: 2543-13	February 2007	
Labour market rating	Recruitment difficulty	
<b>Comment</b> <i>Although nearly all surveyed vacancies were filled, recruitment difficulty is common among public sector employers, especially in remote areas.</i>		

### **Occupational demand**

State Government Budget papers for 2006-07 show that economic growth is forecast to continue. The WA Department of Treasury and Finance indicates that the outlook for the next two years is for further robust growth, with the State economy forecast to grow by four per cent in 2007-08.

The largest employers of Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) are Local Government Authorities (LGAs) and State Government agencies such as the Health Department and the Water Authority. These employers also compete for EHOs with large mining and resource companies that offer more pay for employment in remote regions, often with a focus on occupational health and safety as well as environmental health.

The ABS Labour Force Survey suggests that employment of the occupational and environmental health professionals in WA remained stable over the last four quarters to November 2006, at an average of 1800. A similar average figure recorded in 2005 indicates that there has been little recent change in the size of this workforce.

### **Occupational supply**

Curtin University of Technology provides local training, a three-year Bachelor of Science (Environmental Health) or a Bachelor of Science (Health Sciences) (Honours) with an environmental health major. While there has been an adequate supply of graduates in recent years (25 in 2005 and 26 in 2006), course commencements have declined significantly from 32 in 2004 to 17 in 2005 and 10 in 2006. This trend indicates that the supply of environmental health graduates over the next two to three years will decrease to one third of the current number.

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

The WA Labour Economics Office has not previously assessed this occupation. About 83 per cent of the advertised positions surveyed were filled, either at LGAs or mining companies. There were generally few applicants, although vacancies with two metropolitan LGAs attracted more responses. Nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) of applicants were considered to be suitable for advertised positions, with an average of two suitable applicants per vacancy. Several applicants were already employed as EHOs, therefore, a successful appointment often created a vacancy with another employer. Some employers indicated they expected more people to have applied for their advertised positions, especially graduates, but not enough were entering the market. Recent graduates usually sought higher paying employment with mining companies or work in occupational health and safety positions. Non-metropolitan LGAs, especially those in remote regions, experienced difficulty attracting suitable applicants. According to the WA Environmental Health Officers Professional Review Board, all graduates find employment. However, many councils cannot offer sufficient salary and other benefits (e.g. private use of a vehicle) to attract EHOs and replace retirements.

### **Labour market outlook**

The current demand for environmental health officers is likely to be maintained over at least the next six months. As supply from recent tertiary graduates is unlikely to fully meet this demand, recruitment difficulties are likely to persist in the short term and possibly develop into regional shortage.

<b>Environmental Health Officer</b>		<b>Tasmania</b>
<b>ASCO Code:</b> 2543-13	January 2007	
<b>Labour market rating</b>	Shortage	
<b>Comment</b>		

### **Occupational demand**

There were 86 Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) employed in Tasmania at the time of the 2001 ABS Census. The vast majority of EHOs are employed in the public sector, in local government. The State Government employ a small number and there may also be a small percentage involved with private consultancy work. Demand for EHOs is primarily determined by legislation which requires local councils to enforce laws and regulations concerning environmental protection and public health. Additionally, the World Health Organisation has set a benchmark ratio of one full time EHO to 10 000 population. A 2006 industry profile by the Tasmanian Office of Post Compulsory Education and Training, reports that 11 of the 29 Tasmanian councils are meeting this benchmark.

### **Occupational supply**

The minimum qualification needed to work as an EHO in Tasmania is an Advanced Diploma of Environmental Health. This qualification is presently available through the Tasmanian TAFE system, with the majority of those undertaking the course also working in a cadet position with a local council. In the period from 2001 to 2005, there were a total of 27 people completing the Advanced Diploma in the State. More recently, however, the Tasmanian Director of Public Health has advised that from 2011 the minimum qualification for an EHO will be an approved Bachelor degree. As such, 2007 is the final year of intake for the TAFE Advanced Diploma, which will be taught until 2010. In its place, it has been proposed that the University of Tasmania will develop a Bachelor of Health Science (Environmental Health) course which is anticipated to be available through their Launceston campus in 2008.

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

Employers who recently advertised vacancies for EHOs filled 50 per cent of all positions. It was reported by employers that unsuitable applicants commonly did not have the necessary qualification or the desired level of experience. Industry sources thought that school leavers were not very aware of opportunities available to them in the area of environmental health and this contributed to low numbers entering TAFE training. It was suggested that the introduction of a University course may raise the profile of the profession and there may be more interest from school leavers. Several industry sources commented that the existing EHO workforce is ageing and predominately male. This is supported by a Department of Health and Human Services 2005 survey which found that 57 per cent of the States EHOs were aged 45 years or more and 79 per cent were male. Employers suggested that the ageing of the workforce may result in further shortages in five to ten years when it is anticipated that many of those currently working in the sector retire.

### **Labour market outlook**

The low percentage of filled vacancies, in conjunction with employer comments, supports a rating of shortage. There is no indication that in the next twelve months shortages will ease.

<b>Environmental Health Officer</b>		<b>Northern Territory</b>
<b>ASCO Code:</b> 2543-13	January 2007	
<b>Labour market rating</b>	Shortage	
<b>Comment</b>		

### **Occupational demand**

ABS Census data show that there were 67 environmental health officers employed in the Northern Territory (NT) in 2001. Environment health officer roles in the NT are primarily with the NT Government (rather than with local governments as typical interstate).

### **Occupational supply**

There is a reliance on recruiting environment health officers from interstate. Until recently there has been no locally based environmental health degree offered in the NT. The Batchelor Institute now offers an environmental health degree with an Indigenous health focus, however it is currently only into its second year (of a four year degree) and has conditional approval for graduate qualifications to be recognised (dependent on their skill level). Industry bodies are seeking to establish alternate entry mechanisms for the occupation, such as establishing para-professional and cadetship options, to facilitate quicker and more flexible entry and encourage more people into the field.

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

Very few employers were found who had recently advertised for environmental health officers, but of those who did none filled vacancies within six weeks of advertising. When remote or regional vacancies arise (for example in Alice Springs or Katherine) they can remain vacant for extended periods.

Employers typically use the Australian Institute of Environmental Health and the Local Government Directory websites to advertise vacancies. Newspaper advertisements are considered to be ineffective for the occupation due to the cost and the lack of response they generate. With the reliance on attracting applicants from interstate, employers offer relocation expenses, competitive remuneration and personal development opportunities to motivate people to relocate. Environmental health students are also employed (for example from Swinburne University) during their sandwich year and this helps generate positive word of mouth for roles in the NT.

Wastage of environmental health officers (qualified people leaving the occupation) is considered a significant issue, but in the NT retention was more an issue with people tending to leave to return to their home State. A suggested factor leading to wastage from the occupation is that although graduate salaries are competitive with other occupations, there is limited opportunity for promotion within the profession. NT environmental health officers were said to have more interesting roles with greater diversity than typical due to the large focus on Indigenous community and promotional health work, rather than straight monitoring work for statutory requirements.

Competition for environmental health officers exists from overseas with people attracted to more adventurous roles in developing countries or disaster relief areas.

### **Labour market outlook**

Although there are steps being taken to facilitate greater entry into the occupation and reduce wastage, these will not have had time to make an impact within the coming year. Demand is likely to remain stable, but the difficulty keeping existing roles occupied is expected to continue.