

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

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.