



Safety Culture

Safety Certification Pays Double Jackpot: Better Salary, Better Protection

James Langford | Oct 27, 2022

From the time Jimmy Hughes joined a firm cleaning up hazardous waste at the U.S. Department of Energy’s Oak Ridge Reservation, where materials for atomic weapons were developed during World War II, he was looking for a way to prove himself.

The youngest person on his crew, Hughes realized he had found what he needed when he saw how highly his new employer, United Cleanup Oak Ridge LLC, valued professional certification.

He got to work, first achieving certification by the Board of Certified Safety Professionals as a Safety Trained Supervisor Construction and, eventually, as a Certified Safety Professional, the organization’s gold standard.

Along the way, United Cleanup Oak Ridge selected Hughes for its Rising Senior Leaders Program and promoted him to deputy health and safety manager, a role in which he oversees crews moving large amounts of soil contaminated by wartime production.

Read More: The Path To Becoming A Safety Professional: Certifications and Steps

Certification “gives everyone the ability to voice a concern or raise a complaint or handle issues that may, in another industry, be seen as outside of their area of expertise,” Hughes says in a *post* on the board’s website. “It gives them that ability to create a circle of influence and create change, then ultimately accomplish the goal of safe execution of work, and what that generally leads to is safe execution of work under budget and ahead of schedule.”

Big Paycheck Boost

Hughes’ experience illustrates two of the benefits of certification most commonly cited by safety professionals: career advancement coupled with the skills to strengthen employers’ workplace safety programs.

Safety officers who obtain at least one certification typically earn \$20,000 a year more than peers without any, according to a **2020 survey** by the National Safety Council and the Board of Certified Safety Professionals.

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The not-for-profit board collaborates with both the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the nation's top workplace safety regulator, and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, a branch of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that researches work-related injuries and illnesses and works to prevent them.

Personnel who obtained the board's Certified Safety Professional credential, the designation with the highest experience and education requirements, have typically boosted their salaries by \$30,000 a year, the survey found.

The median salary for safety professionals at the time was \$98,000, according to the survey.

Safety is a noble occupation, says Dave West, director of examinations at the board, one that focuses on protecting workers from harm while increasing their job security and bolstering their employers' bottom lines.

Expertise in the field confers a degree of job security, too.

'There's Always Demand' for Safety

"No matter what industry you're working in, if you know something about safety, there are other fields that are going to want your expertise in safety," he says in a **video presentation**. "I've never had a problem in my career being out of work. There's always demand for what I do as a safety professional."

There are bottom-line payoffs for businesses, too. Employing certified safety managers can indirectly boost sales, since experts have identified a link between strong business safety records and manufacturing contract awards.

While not a requirement for safety professionals, certifications are designed to heighten expertise and can lead to improvements in company policies that prevent costly worker accidents and injuries and the regulatory fines that can accompany them.

Safety Tools: Workplace Injury Cost Calculator

OSHA has the power to impose fines of as much as \$145,027 for willful or repeated violations of its workplace safety standards, and the agency assessed more than \$85 million in penalties in 2021 for just its **10 most frequently cited rules**. Manufacturing often ranked at or near the top of industries ordered to pay those penalties and curbing the charges would be a significant benefit.

A commitment to safety can also make recruiting easier for businesses, which is particularly important for manufacturers facing a shortage of qualified workers amid a historically strong job market: **Unemployment** ticked down to 3.5 percent in September as U.S. employers hired 263,000 workers.

A 2017 survey by **EMPLOYERS**, a firm that provides workers' compensation insurance for small businesses, found workplace safety is among the top qualities job candidates consider when deciding whether to accept a job offer.

Interested in learning more about safety training and education? Resources are available through organizations including the **National Safety Council**, the **American Society of Safety Professionals** and the **American Industrial Hygiene Association**.

Here's a look at entry requirements for some programs from the Board of Certified Safety Professionals, which has issued more than 100,000 credentials since 1969:

Certified Safety Professional

- Education: Bachelor's degree in any field
- Professional experience: At least four years in role where safety accounted for 50 percent or more of responsibilities; duties must be preventive, professional level with breadth and depth
- Minimum credential: At least one board-approved credential

Associate Safety Professional

- Education: Bachelor's degree in any field or associate degree in safety, health or the environment
- Professional experience: At least one year of experience in role where safety accounts for 50 percent of job responsibilities; duties must be preventive, professional level with breadth and depth.
- Minimum credential: N/A

Safety Trained Supervisor

- Education: 30 hours of safety, health and environmental training
- Professional experience: Two years of supervisory experience; OR four years of at least part-time work experience in any industry; OR an associate degree or higher in occupational safety, risk management or construction management; OR completion of a two-year trade or union training program/apprenticeship.
- Minimum credential: N/A

How has your company benefited from professional certifications for its safety managers? Tell us in the comments below.