

Environmental Monitoring Officer

Introduction

Councils are responsible for monitoring their local environment and devising ways of removing or minimising pollution. Environmental monitoring officers are scientific support officers who are employed in the environmental health departments of local authorities to check levels of noise, air pollution and land contamination. They also advise on ways of avoiding pollution when plans for new civil engineering or construction projects are being made.

Work Environment

Environmental monitoring officers spend most of their time outside doing physical monitoring work. They spend some of their time in the office writing reports.

They usually work 37 hours per week, but have to be flexible. They may attend some evening meetings, monitor noise at night, or be called out to emergency situations at any time.

Daily Activities

Environmental monitoring officers' duties vary depending on the kind of pollution they are monitoring and their location. They may also specialise in one area of pollution. Their work with each different type of pollution might involve the following:

- **Air pollution** (often caused by escaping gases or traffic congestion) Environmental monitoring officers have two methods of checking air pollution levels: real time monitoring, which involves placing monitoring devices at certain locations and downloading the information directly to their office computers; and on site readings, where they record details on paper on the spot or download them on to a laptop.
- **Land contamination** Environmental monitoring officers may deal with a number of land contamination problems such as: industrial sites causing pollution by emitting organic waste like oils and phenol; buildings containing heavy levels of asbestos; former collieries that produced contamination from coking ovens. They usually begin this kind of monitoring work by using a Geographical Information Systems (GIS) based mapping system. They consult maps and old records on computer and do a desktop analysis of them. If physical samples are required, they visit the site and collect them.
- **Noise pollution** Environmental monitoring officers check noise pollution at a number of different levels and from a range of sources, for example, major levels of noise pollution from large installations like airports or open cast mines, or domestic noise levels, which are usually monitored at the request of householders with small handheld equipment.

When evidence of pollution or contamination is found, environmental monitoring officers contact those responsible and ask them to deal with the problem. They do this at first by persuasion and negotiation, but if they meet with a refusal, they serve a formal notice and may have to appear as an expert witness in court.

Skills & Interests

Environmental monitoring officers need:

- a strong scientific background,
- an interest in the environment,
- a willingness to work outdoors,
- good communication and negotiation skills,
- good ICT and written communication skills,
- an ability to deal with hostile complaints,
- an ability to explain technical matters simply to non-scientific audiences.