

Drive or  
Move Things

# Heavy Equipment Operator

## Other names for this job

Backhoe operator, bulldozer operator, front-end loader operator, power shovel operator, scraper operator

## What do heavy equipment operators do?

Heavy equipment operators use machines to move dirt, **materials** and **equipment**. For example, heavy equipment operators use **bulldozers**, front-end loaders and power shovels. They dig holes and smooth dirt.

## Meet a heavy equipment operator

Tim is a heavy equipment operator. He drives and operates a front-end loader and a backhoe. He works for a construction company.

Here are things that Tim does:

- He moves the equipment in different ways. He uses the **controls** on the machines. For example, he uses **switches** and foot pedals.
- He checks his equipment. He keeps it clean.
- His front-end loader has a bucket on the front. He can pick up loads of dirt, rocks, sand or snow. Then he moves the loads. Sometimes he puts the loads on the ground. Sometimes he puts the loads into trucks.
- He digs with his backhoe. He fills holes in the ground. He also breaks rock.
- Tim's **foreperson** gives him **instructions**. Sometimes the foreperson uses hand signals. For example, a signal may mean "Put the load here."



### tip

Do you see words in **bold**?  
 You can look up these words at  
[alis.alberta.ca/ERdictionary](http://alis.alberta.ca/ERdictionary).

## What is Tim's work like?

Tim works outside in good and bad weather. His work is seasonal. He works many hours in the spring, summer and fall. Tim often works 12-hour shifts.

Tim's work is often noisy and dirty. Tim must wear earplugs. They protect his ears. Sometimes Tim has to work in small, tight or dangerous places. For example, in a tunnel or pit with large machinery, or on the edge of a big hole.

Tim never works alone. He is part of a construction team. Tim must look for hand signals from workers on the ground.

Sometimes Tim has to travel. His company may send him to **construction sites** in other parts of Alberta.

## Do you want to be a heavy equipment operator?

- You need to be healthy.
- You must have good eyesight. For example, you need to see the edge of a big hole. You need to see how deep the hole is.

- You have to be quick to see a problem. Then you may have to stop or move quickly.
- You have to be good at working with machines. Sometimes the machines don't work well. You may have to make small repairs.
- You must understand and speak English well.
- You need to be able to follow instructions. For example, instructions from workers on the ground.
- You must be careful. You have to pay attention to safety.
- You have to be able to work with a team.

## What education do heavy equipment operators need?

- Heavy equipment operators often learn on the job. They don't need a high school **diploma**. Some people start as construction labourers or truck drivers. Then they may become heavy equipment operators.
- Some people take courses. They can get a heavy equipment operator **certificate**.
- Some employers want heavy equipment operators to have first aid training and special safety courses.

You can ask your **career advisor** or tutor about working as a heavy equipment operator. You can ask about training, too.



## What can heavy equipment operators do in the future?

Heavy equipment operators can work for many different companies. For example, construction companies, logging companies or pipeline companies.

Pipelines carry oil for many kilometres. Heavy equipment operators dig the ground for the pipes.

Some heavy equipment operators start their own business.

Heavy equipment operators with **experience** may become **supervisors**. Some operators may become safety officers.



## Do you want more information?

You can find the information below at [alis.alberta.ca/occinfo](http://alis.alberta.ca/occinfo). Or you can ask your career advisor or tutor.

- OCCinfo profile:  
Heavy Equipment Operator
- Easy Reading Dictionary

You can also ask your career advisor or tutor about jobs that are like Heavy Equipment Operator. 

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### How much does a heavy equipment operator make?

A heavy equipment operator usually makes between \$20.00 and \$40.24 per hour.

## Other jobs to think about

**Crane and hoisting equipment operators** operate **hoist and swing equipment**. They move machines, materials and other large objects.

**Truck drivers** drive trucks and **tractor-trailers**. They deliver things. Some truck drivers drive in their local area. Some truck drivers drive long distances.