

# A Career In Environmental Health

**H**ave you ever wondered who makes sure the food and beverages you buy in your community are safe? Do you ever think about what laws protect your health at an apartment pool or the spa at the fitness center? What about at festivals, farmer's markets, outdoor concerts, celebrity golf tournaments; resort or hotel pools and spas, water parks, and summer camps? All of these publicly attended facilities are regularly inspected by Registered Environmental Health Specialists from County and City Environmental Health Services or Health Departments. As defined in State law, Registered Environmental Health Specialists (REHS) are highly trained,



qualified individuals who conduct a wide range of public health and environmental protection services. Environmental Health Specialists strive to create a safe place to work, live and play in California communities. They are on the front lines of improving the quality of life and take this important job very seriously.

## What is Environmental Health?

In California, you are protected by the sixty-two County and City Environmental Health Agencies and their REHS who work to reduce the incidence of illness or injury for the people in our communities. We do this by monitoring and enforcing regulations of the California Health & Safety Code, local ordinances, and regulations. This is usually accomplished through permitting and inspecting facilities.

The primary local environmental health program elements include:

### Food Protection:

Retail and Consumer Protection is provided in conjunction with State and Federal inspection programs. REHS ensure the day-to-day operations are done in a safe manner to prevent food-borne illness. REHS conduct surveillance of a wide range of food establishments including restaurants, markets, mobile food units, farmers markets, dairy and milk products facilities, vending machines, etc., and Food Facility Plan Check and Construction.



**Housing:** REHS strive to prevent people from having to live in substandard housing and ensure children are not endangered through inspection and enforcement of: housing code enforcement; lead paint remediation; employee housing; jail/detention facilities; organized camps; and motels/hotels. The Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program is also often a part of the housing program.

### Recreational Health and Bathing Facilities:

Environmental health agencies are responsible for the safe construction and operation of all public bathing areas, including pools and spas in the state. Local environmental health agencies monitor coastal and freshwater bathing areas, post warnings, and close beaches with polluted waters to prevent injury or illness.



REHS regulates: Small Public Water System; Well Construction and Destructions; Cross Connection Control Programs; Water Haulers, to ensure **Drinking Water** is safe for the public.

**Solid Waste:** REHS in the solid waste program ensure that laws are followed with regard to the operation of landfills, transfer stations, compost facilities, recycling facilities, and other waste facilities, with the goal of protecting the environment from pollution.



**Liquid Waste:** REHS protect the public and the environment by overseeing the safe handling and disposal of liquid waste

through the safe construction and operation of On-Site Sewage Systems and Greywater Systems; Sewage Pumpers and Haulers; and Wastewater Reclamation Systems.

### Hazardous Materials and Waste:

Specific areas of regulation include Underground Storage Tanks, Hazardous Material Business Plans, and Hazardous Wastes, and the California Accidental Release Prevention Program. REHS often are members of a Hazardous Materials Incident Response Team.



**Medical Waste:** Regulation of generators of medical waste such as doctors, dentists, and hospitals. Body Arts practitioners and facilities are usually regulated under this program. Body Arts include tattoo and piercing.

### Other programs some jurisdictions may oversee:

Noise Control, Pest and Vector Control, Land Use, Air Quality, Radiation Protection, Storm Water Pollution Prevention, and more...

**Another Note:** Some jurisdictions hire REHS to work in several programs while others have REHS working in only one or two programs. The REHS who work in several programs are often called "generalists".

# How to Become An Environmental Health Specialist

- Are you interested in a career that will stay interesting and challenging?
- Do you want a job that puts you in the real world and not the office or lab?
- Are you interested in a job that can make a difference?

If you answered yes to any or all of those questions, then becoming an Environmental Health Specialist may be just what you're looking for.

## What do YOU have to do?

**Complete your Bachelor's Degree in a Science based major.**

Environmental Specialists have a wide variety of degrees: Biological Sciences, Biotechnology, Chemistry, Conservation, Dietetics, Environmental Health, Genetics, Microbiology, Marine Biology, Nutrition Science, Zoology, .... and more!

Your degree needs to have a minimum of 30 semester or 45 quarter basic science units.

**If you have a degree, follow the steps below:**

### I. Obtain a trainee Certification Letter from the State of California Department of Public Health.

- Visit the California Department of Public Health website to see if your degree and course work meets the requirements:

[www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CEH/DRSEM/Pages/EMB/REHS/REHS.aspx](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CEH/DRSEM/Pages/EMB/REHS/REHS.aspx)

- On the website see: Instructions for obtaining your certification letter (under "Apply for REHS").
  - a. Submit transcripts and fee to the State.
  - b. Receive your letter outlining the training and experience hours you will need to complete prior to being eligible for the REHS exam. This is the letter you will need to provide when applying for a job as an Environmental Specialist trainee.

Note: An entry level/ trainee position may be listed differently in each jurisdiction (ie: Assistant Environmental Health Specialist, Environmental Specialist I, Environmental Specialist trainee, etc).

### II. Apply for a "trainee" position in the Counties/Cities where you are interested in working.

Look for job announcements on the California Conference of Directors of Environmental Health website:

[www.ccdeh.com](http://www.ccdeh.com)

or

the California Environmental Health Association (CEHA) website:  
[www.ceha.org](http://www.ceha.org)



### Your first year as an Environmental Specialist I (trainee)

The first year will be spent learning on the job and preparing to take the Registered Environmental Specialist Examination.

Daily activities could include:

Conducting routine inspections and complaint investigations, attending training courses, studying for the REHS exam.

### Pass the Exam

Individuals hired as trainees must pass a registration exam within 36 months of hire. The exam covers all subjects within the field of Environmental Health and ensures that individuals have sufficient education, training, and experience.

### Want to talk to someone?

Call your local County Environmental Health office and ask if someone is available to discuss careers in Environmental Health.

OR

Call someone with the **California Department of Public Health Environmental Health Specialist Registration Program:**

Phone: 916-449-5662 or Email: [REHSProg@cdph.ca.gov](mailto:REHSProg@cdph.ca.gov)

Website:

[www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CEH/DRSEM/Pages/EMB/REHS/REHS.aspx](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CEH/DRSEM/Pages/EMB/REHS/REHS.aspx)