

NATURE OF WORK

Lease operators are responsible for the safe, efficient and economical production of oil wells. Typically assigned 50 to 85 wells, operators take care of a multitude of equipment. Depending on the extent of the field's automation capability, lease operators may encounter well-head compression, separators, dehydrators, storage tanks, measurement equipment and chemical injection equipment. Because lease operators are responsible for getting the natural resources out of a well and delivered into a sales pipeline, this position has become the main focus for many oil and gas companies. To avoid production downtime, operators must have the ability to be forward thinking, determine proactive mechanical repairs, and be able to communicate with company engineers.

WORKING CONDITIONS

A lease operator position is primarily done from a pickup and is geographically out in the field. At least 85% of their daily work time is spent in the field. The term "out in the field" can mean from 3 to 75 miles away from their office. The lease operator is responsible for a specific geographic area with a specific number of wells or leases. The lease operator position is changing from one of having to visit every well often to utilizing the laptop and RTU to make their time much more effective in terms of prioritizing wells with problems.

TRAINING & QUALIFICATIONS

Lease operators can enter the oil and gas production industry with a variety of educational background and oil and gas production experience. The most familiar entry level field jobs are as roustabouts or roughnecks, jobs that usually require little or no previous oil and natural gas production training or experience. However, previous work experience and formal training in petroleum production can provide enhanced knowledge of oilfield operations and increase job advancement.

JOB OUTLOOK

The oil and gas industry has faced severe labor and skill shortages for many years. Many experienced workers left the industry during a slowdown more than a decade ago. Currently they are facing the imminent retirement of large numbers of baby boomers.

*Most of this information was provided by the instructor of Petroleum Technology at San Juan College.

CAREER OPTIONS

Lease Operator

ESTIMATED SALARY RANGE

New Mexico — \$32,600 - \$52,800

RELATED OCCUPATIONS

General and operations managers, petroleum engineers, petroleum pump system operators, wellhead pumpers, rotary drill operators, service unit operators, derrick operators, roustabouts.

SJC Basic Program Information

- Class enrollment is limited to 15-20 students per semester per instructor.
- This degree provides entry-level employees with the basic knowledge and skills of production processes and equipment operation necessary to efficiently and safely monitor, troubleshoot, and operate wells in their area of responsibility.
- Classes transfer to Texas A & M University-Commerce to be used towards a bachelor's degree, see counselor for details.

POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS

ConocoPhillips, BP America, ChevronTexaco, Koch Exploration, Energen Resources, Devon Energy, Dugan Production, Lance Oil, Williams Exploration and Production, Enterprise Products

