



Profile: Aircraft Mechanics and Service Technicians

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Aircraft mechanics and service technicians play an important role in the aviation industry; there will always be a need for safe, well-maintained aircraft. When considering a career in aviation, many people are quick to exclude themselves thinking it is too hard to get hired or that they need many years of technical training, higher education, or military training. True, all of these things would make one more competitive, but there are several occupations for which this is not the case. One good example is the aircraft mechanics and service technicians occupation. It requires postsecondary training; an associate degree is preferred. This is a high-paying occupation projected to grow statewide over the next decade.

High Wages

In Oregon, the annual average pay for aircraft mechanics and technicians is over \$52,700 (\$25.37 per hour). This is well above the annual average pay for workers in many Oregon industries, including transportation and manufacturing. Employers indicate this is one reason for low turnover in this occupation.

One large employer indicated that their shop mechanics stayed an average of about 10 years while their field mechanics lasted about two years. The field mechanics travel with the aircraft on job sites, including overseas sites. Being away from family was the main reason for higher turnover.

Good Job Opportunities

There are more than 1,200 aircraft mechanics and technicians employed in Oregon. Job growth in this occupation is expected to exceed 8 percent over the next decade. Despite slower-than-average net job growth, demand for such workers should be high. In addition to the openings created by economic growth, there will be many replacement openings as people leave the occupation to advance, change careers, or retire.

Most of the aircraft maintenance jobs in the state are located in the large population centers along the I-5 corridor. These include the Portland and Salem metro areas in the Willamette Valley and Jackson and Josephine counties in Southern Oregon. There are smaller significant pockets of employment such as Central Oregon, where job growth in this occupation is expected to exceed 30 percent in the next 10 years.

Almost half of Oregon's aircraft mechanics and technicians are employed by scheduled air transportation companies. Other substantial employers include the federal government, companies providing support for air transportation, logging companies, and nonscheduled air transportation companies. Additional jobs are provided by health care services, trade schools, and aerospace manufacturing companies.

Moderate Training and Experience

Training for this occupation requires postsecondary training to gain the necessary skills. However, those with an associate degree have a competitive advantage. Oregon does not require a license for this occupation, but employers require an airframe and powerplant certification (A & P). This is a standard

used by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Lane Community College in Eugene and Portland Community College offer aircraft mechanic and service technician programs. These programs can be tackled in about two years with both classroom and hands-on learning experience. The practical courses offered are designed to help students pass the exam for the FAA mechanic's certificate with airframe and/or powerplant ratings.

People currently working as aircraft mechanics and technicians come from all age groups. Traditionally, this has been a male-dominated occupation. Employers and educators indicate more women are becoming interested and trained in this occupation, some getting their training in the military and others from trade schools.

Along with education and training most employers want mechanics with at least a few years of experience. Sharon Weaver of Columbia Helicopters in Aurora says that a growing number of applicants are coming out of the military. This is providing a pool of younger workers with both training and a few years experience. Asked whether they have trouble finding workers, she says it is a very competitive field with lots of interest.

Unlike other production and service occupations, the reasons for being turned down seldom involve drugs, poor character, or work habits. Ms. Weaver reports that the people employed in this occupation are very conscientious, have a good work ethic, and are highly skilled.

Conclusion

Aircraft mechanics and service technicians will be in demand statewide for at least the next decade. Annually, there are many replacement openings in addition to growth openings. This provides opportunities for those looking for a new career, leaving the military or those just entering the workforce. The future is bright for this high-paying occupation as safe, well-maintained aircraft will always be in demand.

