

LABOUR MARKET NEWS

Alberta Employment and Immigration



Slave Lake • High Prairie

Rev it up: Careers in automotives

In the past five years, the number of motor vehicles registered in Alberta has grown to 2.9 million, an increase of 500,000. As the number of vehicles grows, so does the need for skilled workers to maintain and repair them so they are safe to drive.

From tire technicians to automotive service technicians and auto body technicians, there are many opportunities in the region to build a career in the automotive services industry. Local auto body and automotive repair shops, service centres, car and truck dealerships, specialty shops and companies with fleet vehicles regularly hire workers in automotive services. Many employers are finding it difficult to recruit workers.

Workers in high demand

“The industry is so short-handed right now,” says Dave Adams, owner of Falher Ford, which employs two automotive technicians and is looking to hire a third. “There’s not enough young people going into the trade, but there’s definitely a good future in it.”

Big Lakes Dodge in High Prairie has recruited automotive technicians from Eastern Canada and overseas after getting no response to local job ads. “Everybody is hurting for skilled technicians,” says service manager Tim Anderson.

Auto body shops are facing a similar situation. Jeff Way, owner of Slave Lake Autobody Specialists, has also looked to the Maritimes to fill job vacancies. “There’s a shortage of auto body workers all across Canada,” says Way.



Korey Cunningham is an automotive technician in High Prairie.

Gain experience on the job

You don’t necessarily need experience to find work in automotives. Workers often start in entry-level positions, such as labourer, tire technician or apprentice, and gain skills through on-the-job training. From there, they can move up to become a journeyman technician, supervisor, manager and even business owner.

“There are opportunities for someone who is motivated to work their way up within the company,” notes Rick Pollock, manager of Fountain Tire in High Prairie, where three tire technicians, two automotive apprentices and one journeyman automotive technician are on staff.

People with experience in the industry say the work is interesting, challenging and rewarding. “There’s always something different to do and learn each and every day,” says Anderson.

Turn to pages 2 and 3 for more information on automotive careers.

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NEXT ISSUE...

Electricians, instrumentation technicians and apprenticeships

Automotive service technician

Rick Pollock knows first-hand the great career opportunities available in the automotive industry. He's gone from tire technician to journeyman automotive service technician to his current job, manager of Fountain Tire in High Prairie.

"I've always had an interest in figuring out how and why stuff works. Working in automobiles is very challenging, some days frustrating, but most days pretty rewarding," says Pollock.

Auto service centres, car and truck dealerships and companies with fleet vehicles employ automotive service technicians to maintain and repair all makes of passenger cars and light trucks. The *Alberta Occupational Demand and Supply Outlook (2007-2017)* forecasts a shortage of automotive service technicians (NOC 7321) between 2009 and 2017, but local employers are already reporting recruiting difficulties.

The job

Technicians usually work five to six days a week, with occasional overtime. They are on their feet most of the day and the work can be physically demanding. New technology means computer diagnostics are becoming more

common. "Technicians have to be good problem solvers. It's more than just replacing parts," says Falher Ford owner Dave Adams.

They usually have to supply their own safety gear, such as steel-toed boots. They also buy their own tools, which may be tax deductible. A driver's licence is required by some employers.

Trade up

Automotive service technicians must be registered apprentices or have a journeyman ticket or recognized trade certificate to work in Alberta. Apprentices learn through a mix of on-the-job training and technical schooling (for complete details go to www.tradesecrets.gov.ab.ca).

Getting started

Some employers hire labourers to do shop clean-up and assist technicians, and many are willing to hire and train apprentices. Some employers want apprentices to take a pre-employment course to learn basic skills (see page 8 for details).

"I like to see that course under somebody's belt before I'll take them on as an apprentice. It shows commitment on the the part of the employee," says Tim Anderson,

TIRE TECHNICIAN

Tire technicians work in auto service centres installing and repairing tires on everything from passenger vehicles to light and medium trucks, semi-trailers and farm equipment. Other duties include rotating tires, checking tire pressure and wheel re-torques.

Employers often provide on-the-job training for new technicians. Safety tickets, such as First Aid and WHMIS, would be an asset. Tire technicians may advance to automotive service apprentices. In the region, tire technicians earn around \$12 to \$16, depending on their experience.

service manager at Big Lakes Dodge in High Prairie.

Pay

According to Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training, journeyman wages range from \$25 to \$35 per hour. Apprentices earn a percentage of the journeyman rate, which increases as they complete their training. Company benefits may be available through some employers.

Advancement

Auto body technicians can advance into supervisory positions, management or start their own repair shop.



Tire technician

Auto technician



Service manager



Auto body technician

From sanding and edging to prepping and painting, second-year auto body apprentice Jody Dahlgren enjoys all aspects of her job. “It’s interesting, challenging and fun work,” she says. “It’s been a good learning experience for me. Every day I learn something new.”

Dahlgren works at Slave Lake Autobody Specialists, one of several auto body repair shops operating in the region. Auto body technicians like Dahlgren are in demand across Alberta and Canada.

“There’s quite a shortage of workers in the auto body industry. Part of it is because we haven’t had a continual influx of young people into the trade,” says Brian Campbell, owner of Brian’s Auto Body in High Prairie.

The job

Auto body technicians repair, replace and refinish the inside and outside of damaged vehicles. They usually work a five-day week, with occasional overtime. Work conditions can be dusty and noisy with some paint fumes, although



Auto body apprentice Jody Dahlgren.

most shops are well ventilated. A driver’s licence is required by some employers and technicians usually supply their own safety gear and some tools, which may be tax deductible.

Trade up

To work in Alberta, auto body technicians (NOC 7322) must be registered apprentices or hold a journeyman ticket or recognized trade certificate. Apprentices learn the trade through on-the-job training and technical schooling (see www.tradesecrets.gov.ab.ca for more information). Auto body apprentices can specialize in one of three areas:

- Prepper:** two-year apprenticeship
- Repairer:** three-year apprenticeship
- Refinisher:** two-year apprenticeship

Apprentices who finish both the repairer and refinisher training qualify for certification as an auto body technician.

Getting started

Local employers may hire shop hands or labourers to do basic tasks, such as sanding or shop clean-up, then hire them on as apprentices. Starting as a shop hand or labourer is a good way to see if you like the work.

“It’s hard work. There’s lifting involved, chemical smells and fumes. You really need to have a love for fixing cars,” says Campbell. “It’s satisfying work—finishing a job, seeing it going out the door looking like new again.”

Pay

Journeyman wages range from \$19 to \$35 per hour, according to figures from the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training. Apprentices earn a percentage of the journeyman rate, but this increases as they complete their training. Some employers offer company benefits.

Advancement

Auto body technicians can advance into supervisory positions, start their own business or move into related jobs, such as damage estimator.

GLASS INSTALLERS: WORKING ON THE CUTTING EDGE

Various companies in the region specialize in installing auto glass in all types of vehicles, from cars and light trucks to semis and heavy equipment. Many will hire people with no experience and provide on-the-job training.

“You can pretty much come in off the street, as long you have an interest in learning and aren’t afraid of doing some hard work,” says Bill Jensen, manager of All-West Glass in Slave Lake.

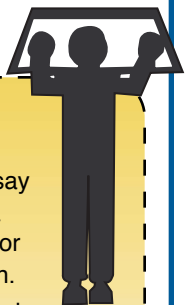
Many companies, like All-West Glass, also do residential and commercial window and door installation, making the work interesting and varied.

“It’s something different every day. That’s why I’ve been doing it for so long and I still enjoy doing it,” says Lorelei Wenckowski, who has 20 years experience as a glass installer. She is the owner of First Windshield and Glass in Slave Lake, which does mostly auto glass installation and

rock chip repairs, as well as some residential and commercial work. Both Jensen and Wenckowski say that labour shortages in the region are making it a challenge to hire workers. “We’re always looking for people. It’s only getting busier here,” notes Jensen.

Glass shops in the region are usually open five to six days a week. Hours are typically 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., although some overtime may be required.

Glass installers who want to advance their careers can become glaziers (NOC 7292). There is a two-year glazier—auto glass technician apprenticeship in Alberta, focusing on automotive and flat glass installation. There is also a four-year glazier apprenticeship, which focuses on glass and aluminum systems installation for commercial, residential and automotive applications. To learn more about the glazier trade, see www.tradesecrets.gov.ab.ca.



profile



Doug Croft

Doug is a third-year automotive service technician at Falher Ford.

Doug works in a three-person automotive repair shop for the Falher Ford dealership. As an automotive service technician, he repairs and maintains vehicles of various models, from small cars to full-size trucks.

“I enjoy coming to work every day. It’s not the same old monotonous, boring stuff.”

Profiles are prepared for various occupations featured in Labour Market News, to put a friendly face on the stories.

Q Briefly describe your career path.

A Automotives has been an interest of mine since I was a little kid. My dad always fumbled around with his own vehicles and I just picked up interest from that. Someone has to keep the world rolling. I started as a tire technician and have worked my way up to an automotive service technician third-year apprentice.

Q How does your job affect your lifestyle?

A It’s a nine-to-five kind of job. I get to go home every day and I’m free pretty much every weekend to go out and do stuff with my wife and three children. I don’t work overtime and I’m never on call.

Q What are the rewards of your job?

A You get a feeling of accomplishment every day. It’s satisfying to know that the people driving around town and down the highways are safe because you’ve fixed any problems they had with their vehicle. I enjoy interacting with customers. It lets you put a face on the repair.

Q What are some of the challenges you face?

A There’s not a day that goes by that you don’t learn something new. It can be a challenge to learn the different aspects of the job, but there’s another technician here who’s really knowledgeable. If I have any problems I just ask him and

he helps me through it. Dealing with demanding customers can occasionally be a challenge.

Q What kind of person is suited to this job?

A You should be fairly mechanical and not mind getting your hands dirty. You should have the ability to do some problem solving on your own. It’s a pretty physically demanding job at times. You’re on your feet pretty much eight hours a day. It helps to be an outgoing person and generally a happy-go-lucky kind of guy, because not everything always works out.

Q Would you choose this career again?

A Absolutely. I enjoy coming to work every day. It’s not the same old monotonous, boring stuff.

Q Has technology changed the way you do your job?

A We use computers more and more to diagnose problems and it actually makes life easier. It takes a lot of the guess work out of things. In school they teach you how to use basic technology and Ford offers regular professional development.

Q What are your future career goals?

A I will probably be here until I’m old and grey. The company and the people I work with are awesome—it’s a great team environment. I also want to get my journeyman ticket. I should be done by 2009.

Exploring careers in oil and gas servicing

Every day we use oil and gas to fuel our vehicles and heat our homes. Getting this valuable commodity from the field to consumers is a task that requires hundreds of skilled workers to accomplish.

Besides rig crews that drill and maintain the oil and gas wells, there are many other workers needed to help with the extraction and production process. In the region, operators are in especially high demand. This includes positions like field production operators, wireline operators and well service equipment operators, such as cementing, acidizing, fracturing and nitrogen operators.

Oil and gas service companies operating around Slave Lake, High Prairie, Wabasca, Britnell, Red Earth

Creek and other areas have regular job openings for these types of positions. These companies are seeking people who are interested in long-term careers in the oil and gas industry. Many

offer training and professional development opportunities to help workers steadily advance into more responsible roles.

“This is a career choice. It’s not a job where you come in and make quick cash and take six months of the year off. This is a long-term commitment,” says Joe Hickey, owner of Kodiak Wireline Services in Slave Lake.

While the pay and benefits are excellent, many companies are still having a hard time recruiting. The work can be physically demanding, the hours long and some jobs require workers to travel to remote areas across the province, staying in camps for one to two weeks at a time. It’s a lifestyle that doesn’t suit everyone. “Right now, we’re considering bringing in temporary foreign workers. I could hire 10 workers today, but it’s nearly impossible to get anybody in this industry,” says Hickey. “There is just such a shortage of people everywhere.”

No experience required

With demand for workers high, many companies are willing to hire people with no experience. “If we can’t find good people with experience, then we’ll hire somebody who is green—if they have a good attitude—and train them,” says Leonard Janzen, area

superintendent for Canadian Natural Resources Ltd. in Slave Lake, which has regular openings for entry-level field production operators.

Companies prefer candidates with a Grade 12 diploma, or equivalent. Having safety tickets is also an asset, but companies often provide training for courses such as First Aid and H2S Alive. Many companies also require a minimum Class 5 driver’s licence, but will provide training for Class 3 or Class 1. A strong work ethic, problem solving skills and a mechanical aptitude are some of the basic skills employers seek.

“If something goes wrong, you’ve got to figure out how to fix it,” says Ben Bautel, owner of Slave Lake Specialties, which does contract service work for various oil companies in the region.

Room to move

With experience, companies provide workers with plenty of room to advance. For example, within one to two years, a wireline assistant can advance to become a wireline operator, which will boost their pay from around \$60,000 a year up to \$150,000 a year. In three to five years, entry-level field production operators can advance to plant or battery operators, which brings increased responsibility and pay.

“In this industry, you can advance pretty fast into supervisory or management positions. I’ve known workers who have started at the bottom and they’re at the head of the company now,” says Bautel. For more information on operator jobs, see pages 6 and 7.

What to expect

- * Working away from home for long periods of time
- * Shift work— for example, eight days on and six days off or 15 days on and six off
- * Travelling to remote areas and staying in camps or hotels
- * Long hours—10 to 12 hour work days
- * Pre-employment drug testing and a pre-employment physical exam
- * Outdoor work in all weather conditions
- * Some physical labour
- * Driving long distances in challenging road and weather conditions

Field production operators

Driving from well site to well site, field production operators (NOC 9232) make sure oil and gas wells are running smoothly. They inspect, maintain, monitor and do minor repairs to wells, facilities and equipment. They also collect and record data, such as chart, meter and pressure readings.

"We give an operator a run of 30 to 50 wells to look after. They jump in the truck, drive to each well and do all their inspections," says Leonard Janzen, area superintendent for Canadian Natural Resources Ltd. (CNRL) in Slave Lake.

On-the-job training provided

Field production operator is an entry-level position and workers are in demand. Previous oilfield experience and safety tickets are an asset, but many oil companies will provide on-the-job training. A minimum Class 5 driver's licence and pre-employment drug testing are usually required. Employers look for candidates who are good at math, have a strong mechanical aptitude, good computer skills and a good work ethic. Candidates should be able to work independently, but have good communication skills.

Getting started

To start, new operators learn by working with experienced operators. Oil companies often hire field production operators through oilfield contractors, like Slave Lake Specialties. "Operators work for me anywhere from three to six months. That gives the oil company a chance to check them out. They hire them directly if they're happy with their performance," says Slave Lake Specialties owner Ben Bautel.

What it's like

Field production operators work year-round. They work in shifts, typically eight days on and six days off. They usually work 10- to 12-hour days. Many well sites are located in



Field production operators can advance to plant or battery operators, working at field stations around the region.

remote areas, so a lot of driving is required. Field operators may live in camps while they are on the road. "Most camps are only two-person camps. Some camps have a base with around 10 people. It's kind of a solitary life," says Bautel.

However, some wells are located close to towns, so operators are able to drive home each night.

Advancement

Companies like CNRL encourage field operators to take courses for higher levels of production operator training (Northern Lakes College offers four levels of training, see below). "With each level you have more responsibility and you also get a pay increase," says Bautel.

After three to five years experience, field production operators can advance to plant or battery operators, working at field stations (pipeline collection systems) located around the region.

Pay

According to the 2007 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey, Petroleum, Gas and Chemical Process Operators had an average annual salary of \$77,500 per year.

Oilfield operator training at Northern Lakes College

Full time

Northern Lakes College (NLC) is now offering a five-month Oilfield Operator Training program at its Slave Lake and Wabasca campuses.

The program was introduced after oil and gas production companies indicated a high demand for pre-trained production operators.

According to the college, companies want career-minded, mechanically inclined, logical thinkers who can problem solve and work independently.

The program provides students with hands-on production operations, production reporting and optimization training, complete with safety and environmental awareness training. There is also a one-month work experience field placement. Graduates receive a Certificate of Achievement for Production Field Operations.

Part time

NLC also offers part-time Production Field Operations courses, which provide a detailed overview of oilfield operations

technology. Graduates can obtain employment as oil well, battery or gas plant operators, or oilfield construction and maintenance workers. The part-time courses are taught through a mix of self-study work and lectures, which are delivered by an instructor live over the Internet. Production Field Operators Level A, B, C and D are offered on rotation.

Contact NLC

For more information, contact NLC at 1-866-652-3456 or go online to www.northernlakescollege.ca.

**Get more
online!**

PHOTO ESSAYS: Visit employment.alberta.ca/northwest for online photo essays featuring well service operators and plant operators working for local companies.

SNUBBING, POWER TONG AND COILED TUBING OPERATORS: Want to learn more about these careers in well servicing? Go online to employment.alberta.ca/northwest and check out the Peace River-High Level Labour Market News bulletin from November 2007.



Wireline operators

Wireline operators (NOC 8232) lower and raise instruments or tools into wells on different kinds of metal cable, or wireline. This is done to enhance well performance and to gather data for other workers, such as geologists and engineers. Operators drive large truck units to transport the wireline to well sites.

There are several wireline companies operating in the region. Many have regular job openings for entry-level wireline assistants and experienced wireline operators (they are also called e-line or slickline operators).

Getting started

Wireline assistants assist operators by: maintaining and servicing equipment, driving vehicles, conducting inspections, preparing, testing and loading equipment and doing site clean up. With one to two years experience, assistants can move up to become wireline operators. Operators plan each job, select, test and transport equipment, operate pressure control equipment, run and/or assemble tools and supervise/train other employees.

With workers in demand, companies are willing to provide on-the-job training for assistants. "If an applicant has a clean driver's abstract and a Class 5 driver's licence, we're willing to hire them and put them through H2S and First Aid training. We can get them out on the job with those two courses," says Joe Hickey, owner of Kodiak Wireline Services in Slave Lake.

On the road

Crews of two or three workers travel to well sites across the region, many located in remote locations. They often stay in camps. A typical shift is 15 days on and six days off. Depending on the jobs, projects could take three to 12 hours to complete, says Hickey. Work can be physically demanding and is done outdoors in all weather conditions.

Many wireline companies offer ongoing training opportunities. For example, Kodiak offers Class 3 driver's training (required for operators), a well-head boom apprenticeship and other specialty courses. Wireline work may slow down in spring, but that is changing as companies build all-terrain units that can access remote well sites, even in wet muskeg. Workers are usually paid their base salary, even when work slows.

With no experience, Hickey says wireline assistants can make around \$60,000 a year. Experienced operators can make \$150,000 to \$200,000 per year.

Well service operators

Well service equipment operators (NOC 8412) are called in to oil and gas wells to perform specialized services to improve production. Large truck units are driven to well sites to complete these services, which include:

- * **Cementing:** A mixture of cement, water and additives is pumped through the well casing or tubing to seal the casing and secure it in place
- * **Acidizing:** Strong acid is pumped into the well to open flow channels in the rock
- * **Fracturing (fracking):** Fluid containing granular material (called sand) is pumped under pressure into the well to fracture the underground rock formation, create channels in the rock and improve production
- * **Nitrogen injection:** A combination of nitrogen gas and acidizing/fracturing fluids is pumped into wells to increase flow, displace fluid from the well bore or pressure test well heads and tubing.

Several companies offer these services in the region and many are having difficulty recruiting operators to do the work.

Larry Galenza, master supervisor with BJ Services, says his company is hiring and will train people with no experience if they are willing to travel to isolated well sites, live in camps or hotels and do the work, which can be physically demanding and is done outdoors, in all weather conditions. A typical shift is 15 days on and six days off, with 10 to 12 hour work days.

Previous experience on a rig crew and having a Class 1 or Class 3 driver's licence with airbrake endorsement is an asset, but not required for entry-level positions. Many companies will provide safety training, such as First Aid and H2S Alive.

Advancement

"Without experience, you start out as an operator trainee. You move up to operator one, two, three and four and then you're a supervisor trainee. Then there are three levels of supervisors, too," says Galenza.

Companies encourage operators to advance and often provide the extra training needed to move up the career ladder.

Pay for entry-level operators starts at around \$40,000 per year. Experienced operators in supervisory positions are making \$160,000 and up, says Galenza. Servicing work is required year-round.

Looking for career and employment information?

All Alberta Employment and Immigration (E&I) offices provide in-depth assistance to job seekers and career researchers. E&I's mission is to provide services and information that enable individuals to succeed in the changing workforce, foster safe and healthy workplaces and assist people in need.

How E&I can help you find a job

E&I offices and contracted service providers help Albertans find satisfactory employment through:

- career counseling
- resume building services and workshops
- job placement and workplace training programs
- skill development services and self-employment programs
- free photocopying, faxing and Internet services for job searches

For those seeking training, E&I also provides:

- a place to apply for programs, scholarships and bursaries
- information about potential funding options



Slave Lake Labour Market Information Centre (LMIC)

E&I services for employers

E&I helps employers find staff and can provide a place to conduct interviews or host job fairs.

Contact us

To find out more about E&I services, contact the office nearest your community from the list to the right, or call 310-0000 toll-free from anywhere in Alberta. You can also visit our website at employment.alberta.ca.

Alberta Employment and Immigration Offices

Slave Lake

Alberta Service Centre Slave Lake
Labour Market Information Centre
Phone 780-849-7290
Youth Connections, Phone 780-849-1979
2nd Floor Lakeland Centre, 101 Main St. S

Alberta Job Corps
1008-7 St. NE, Phone 780-849-7194

High Prairie

Alberta Service Centre High Prairie
Labour Market Information Centre
Phone 780-523-6794
Youth Connections, Phone 780-523-6796
2nd Floor Provincial Building, 5226-53 Ave.

Alberta Job Corps
4120-53 Ave., Phone 780-523-6630

Wabasca / Desmarais

Labour Market Information Centre
891 Main St., Mistassiniy Road South
Phone 780-891-8906

Alberta Job Corps, Phone 780-891-3930

Trout Lake / Peerless Lake

Alberta Job Corps, Phone 780-869-3991

Other career & employment services

Slave Lake

Community Futures, Suite 1—100 Poplar Lane (Information Centre, 2.2 km east of Hwy. 2 and Hwy. 88 intersection)
Phone 780-849-3232

Métis Nation of Alberta Employment Assistance Service Centre, 349 Main St.
Phone 780-849-4660 or 1-888-486-3847

Slave Lake Native Friendship Centre
416-6 Ave. NE, Phone 780-849-3039

High Prairie

Métis Nation of Alberta Employment Assistance Service Centre, 4910-51 Ave.
Phone 780-523-2004

Falher

L'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta 308 Main St.
Phone 780-837-5168

Wabasca

Métis Nation of Alberta Employment Assistance Service Centre
2691 Strawberry Lane
Phone 780-891-2363

Pre-trades courses at NAIT's Fairview campus

NAIT's Fairview campus offers a 32-week General Mechanic Pre-employment program, which teaches students basic theory and repair techniques for gasoline and diesel engines. Graduates can write the first-year automotive service technician or heavy equipment technician apprenticeship exams. Fairview campus also offers a 19-week Co-operative Trades Orientation program, which provides an overview of all 51 Alberta trades, including auto body technician, parts technician, automotive service technician and motorcycle mechanic. For details, go online to www.nait.ca.

We want your **feedback!**

Forward comments, suggestions and requests for articles to:

Phone: 780-425-6741

E-mail: eii.webmaster@gov.ab.ca

Want to see all the employment news and information from the Slave Lake / High Prairie Area? Go online to:

employment.alberta.ca/northwest

For information on resources and services about career and education decisions:

Call the Alberta Career Information Hotline at 780-422-4266 or 1-800-661-3753 or 310-0000

or visit the Alberta Learning Information Service website at

www2.alis.alberta.ca. You can search ALIS by career title or by NOC code (National Occupational Classification).

For online employment listings, check out www.alis.gov.ab.ca/worksearch or www.lakesideleader.com or www.southpeaceneews.com

