

Spotlight on Drilling and Service Rig Operators



Drilling and service rigs dot the Canadian landscape, and play an important role in meeting our everyday needs for petroleum products. Without these rigs, we would not have heat for our homes, fuel for our cars or everyday products that are made out of plastic. Picture yourself operating these rigs and playing a key role in the initial stages of oil and gas production!

Drilling is the first step that follows the identification of oil and gas fields by Geologists. Not all drilling is successful, but when it is, wells are put in motion to begin the production process. Drilling rigs are used to drill the initial hole for the oil or gas well. It is then removed and replaced by a service rig. The crew prepares the well for production and returns periodically for maintenance, production enhancement and for plugging it when it stops producing.

Service rigs vary in type and size, depending on well depths. On offshore platforms, drilling and service rigs are typically all in one and their functions are very similar to land-based operations.



*Service rig workers.
Courtesy of Enerplus.*



What do Drilling and Service Rig Operators do?

The responsibilities of drilling and service rig operators are very similar. What differs is the equipment and the time spent on site.

Drilling Rig Operators consist of three jobs:

- **Motorhands:** Maintain drilling rig engines, transmissions, heating systems, diesel/electric generators, motors, hydraulic systems, and other mechanical equipment.
- **Derrickhands:** Operate and maintain drilling fluid systems and pumps during the drilling process.
- **Drillers:** Supervise the crew and operate the drill line reels, rotary equipment and pumps.

Service Rig Operators consist of two jobs:

- **Derrickhands:** Set up and dismantle the derrick, pumps and tanks; and service, operate, inspect and monitor all pumps and engines.
- **Operator/Drillers:** Supervise the on-site service crew and all operations of the rig.



How do I become a Drilling and Service Rig Operator?

Employers prefer all operators to have a high school diploma and basic experience in entry-level rig roles, such as Floorhands and Leasehands. These jobs load/unload trucks, help lay pipe into the well, remove debris and perform other basic maintenance duties around the site.

Employers also look for people in good physical condition with a strong work ethic, willingness to learn, and clean drug/alcohol test results. Operators must possess a valid drivers' license in good standing.



A drilling rig.





What are the working conditions like?

Onshore, work is mostly performed outdoors in remote locations, so you may be exposed to extreme weather, and you may stay at hotels, motels or camps. Dirt, dust, noise and fumes are typical of rig operations. You might be required to lift items that weigh more than 25 kilograms. Following safety protocols is essential, as some exposure to potentially hazardous conditions is possible. Worker safety is of great concern to the oil and gas industry. Employment is often seasonal in nature.

By its nature, work on an offshore rig or vessel is isolated. You may be exposed to inclement weather, rough sea and potentially hazardous work conditions; however safety protocols are strictly adhered to. Everyone works as a team. Crew quarters and meals are provided.

Drilling Rig Operators work rotational 12 hour shifts in a 24/7 work environment. Service Rig Operators typically work 8 or 12 daylight hour shifts depending on the employer. Drilling Rig Operators are more prone to being away from home for extended periods than are Service Rig Operators. Appropriate time off is given depending on the rotation and overtime is common.



A service rig. Courtesy of Canadian Association of Oil Well Drilling Contractors.



Do I fit the bill?

Do you think you have what it takes to become a Drilling and Service Rig Operator?

- I am good at solving technical problems and think quickly on my feet.
- I am not afraid of asking questions.
- I have good concentration skills and am not easily distracted.
- I can understand and relay technical instructions.
- I have good leadership skills.
- I am capable of working with potentially hazardous materials and equipment with the right training.
- I can handle physical exertion and exposure to heights.
- I am capable of working rotational shifts, long hours and changes in routine.
- I can cope with extensive travel to and from rig locations.
- I can work and live in isolated regions for extended periods of time.
- I can be absent from home for prolonged periods.
- I believe in team work and understand that other people will be relying on me.
- I believe that following safety policies and procedures is very important.
- I believe that I have what it takes to be an excellent Drilling and Service Rig Operator!



Quick tips and next steps!

- Visit career fairs and talk to oilwell drilling and service employers. Check with employment centres, educational institutions, newspapers, petroleum-related magazines and the internet for information on career fairs.
- Check the electronic version of *OilDriller Magazine* found on the Canadian Association of Oilwell Drilling Contractors website at: <http://www.caodc.ca/>
- Check out Facebook, You Tube and other Internet sites for interesting insights to the life on drilling and service rigs.
- Check out petroleum industry museums such as the Canadian Petroleum Discovery Centre Leduc #1 at www.c-pic.org/index.htm.
- Look for summer jobs with rig operators and gain experience as a Floorhand or Leasehand.



Workers in the field. Courtesy of Enerplus.

Want more info?

For information on other industry occupations check out www.careersinoilandgas.com.