

## **OIL WELL DRILLER**

**Job Description:** With the tremendous growth of North Dakota's oil industry in recent years continuing into the foreseeable future comes the need for an increasing number of oil derrick operators, also known as oil well drillers. Working closely with geologists and others, these are the individuals who set up and operate the drilling rigs for the extraction of oil. This is demanding work involving long hours in sometimes less than ideal conditions, but it is also a high paying job for those who enjoy rugged and challenging outdoor work in a variety of locations. The derrick operator has many responsibilities, including: inspection of the derrick prior to it being raised or lowered; repairing, cleaning and oiling derricks in order to maintain proper working conditions; controlling the viscosity (thickness) and weight of the drilling fluid; and repairing pumps, mud tanks, and related equipment. With new technology and the use of computerized equipment, drilling rigs do not require as many individuals to run them as they used to.

**Needed Skills and Education:** The typical entry-level education requirement is a high school diploma or its equivalent. On-the-job training is provided to new recruits. Post-secondary education and even engineering degrees are beneficial for advancing to the level of drilling supervisors, but that position can also be achieved with years of work experience. Derrick operators require medium levels of skill for setting up equipment, following equipment and machine operating instructions, operating earth moving or drilling equipment, and equipment maintenance. They need to be problem solvers and able to respond quickly to issues that arise with the operations.

**Wages:** In North Dakota, the average annual wage of an oil well driller/derrick operator is \$66,120. This is considerably higher than the national average annual wage of \$56,540. The hourly pay ranges from a beginning level of \$16.26/hour to \$43.45/hour for an experienced driller. The demand for drillers nationwide is expected to remain steady or increase, while the outlook for North Dakota is for an increasing number of positions.

**Other Information:** As mentioned previously, this is demanding work involving long hours in many different locations and in many challenging conditions. Drillers need to be strong to work heavy equipment, and they often need to climb the oil derricks to heights of 200 feet. They typically work 12-hour days for up to seven days, but that is then followed by up to seven days off. The job requires constant travel from home so it is best suited to those who enjoy life on the road.

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