

Career Opportunities in Environmental Policy / Program Management

Over the past 100 years, environmental policy careers have tracked the environmental movement generally. Early efforts were targeted at conservation and preservation, which then grew into the pollution regulation and mitigation focus of the 1970's through mid-1990's. Today's environmental managers and policy makers are focused on pollution prevention, natural resource development or protection, and integration of environmental considerations into economic and social decision-making.

Population and economic growth pressures are creating complex environmental problems that directly impact all aspects of human society. Sustainable development, once the cutting edge of environmental issues, is now expanding to incorporate education, governance and democracy, poverty reduction, public health, security, and economic strategy along with traditional environmental fields of agriculture, natural resource management, pollution abatement and conservation. For example, waste management cannot be addressed with simply landfill policies, but must incorporate smart growth, recycling, emission capture, and creation of markets to turn waste into a useful commodity.

Challenges for today's international environmental policy analysts include: controlling global climate change, considering environmental regulations in treaties and trade agreements, creating environmentally and economically sustainable development, and helping the private sector find ways to incorporate environmental concerns into business planning. In much of the world, basic environmental management such as water resources, wetlands protection and restoration, and environmental health are also very important developments as economic progress puts stress on existing systems.

Career-related activities within this field include policy and scientific research, environmental education and advocacy, regulatory and legislative design, technical assistance to government agencies for planning and management, regulatory compliance and enforcement, and entrepreneurial development in environmental products and services.

Career Paths and Entry Salaries

Entry level positions in international environmental policy can be found in government, private industry, international organizations, and research, non-profit and non-governmental organizations.

The U.S. federal government is the largest single employer in the environmental career world. While the Environmental Protection Agency is the agency traditionally associated with environmental policy development in the U.S., including international environmental policy, many federal agencies pursue international environmental activities, including agencies like the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Food and Drug Administration. One program that provides entry into the federal government is the Presidential Management Fellowship program, which has a starting salary in the low forties.

The private sector has both traditional businesses and consulting firms. Traditional businesses seek qualified managers to work in environmental compliance programs, to incorporate environmental concerns into business strategies, to improve performance by waste reduction and energy efficiency, and to develop sustainable strategies. Environmental consulting firms provide technical assistance to both domestic and foreign government agencies as they work on environmental problems and solutions. They need both

administrative managers who write and manage the contract proposals and technical experts who provide the research for various tasks in an awarded contract. Starting as a contract employee with a consulting firm might provide an entry point into environmental consulting. While starting salaries are not unusually high, income is often supplemented with additional compensation or benefits for staff that travel overseas regularly.

Non-profit and non-governmental organizations, while numerous, do not offer significant employment opportunities and those are all highly competitive. According to a survey by the Environmental Careers Organization, the 30 best-known environmental non-profit organizations employ less than 5,000 total, and approximately half of those employees are with The Nature Conservancy, the largest environmental non-profit group. While salaries are sometimes lower in non-profits than in government or private organizations, non-profit boards are showing more willingness to reward hard work with increased compensation in order to maintain organizational stability.

Qualifications Necessary / Application Procedures to Enter Field

In most cases, a graduate degree is essential to success in the international environmental field. Programs in public policy, environmental management, international relations, public health or law can provide some of the necessary skills. Some institutions offer joint degrees, allowing students to get skills in both policy analysis and environmental science. Expertise in regional politics and economics are helpful in understanding economic, political, and social consequences of environmental policy decisions. An environmental science background is also valuable in positions where specialized knowledge is important.

In addition to educational credentials, a demonstrated commitment to environmental issues is critical to success in this field, shown through both volunteer and paid experiences. These experiences will also provide essential networking opportunities. However, passion and commitment will not be sufficient for a career in environmental advocacy. Non-profit organizations look for staff with management, analytical, communications and fundraising skills. Coursework in non-profit management or social entrepreneurship is important for a career in non-profit and non-governmental organizations.

Multidisciplinary education and experience is also important for international environmental positions, which have now expanded beyond strict environmental issues to include economics, politics, negotiation, and management. The ability to bring other disciplines to bear on the solutions to environmental problems is an important skill, as most jobs will require more than one type of skill. In addition, the ability to translate the science into policy will be highly regarded.

For those who wish to pursue international work, foreign language skills and overseas field experience are desirable to potential employers and highly recommended. GIS and information technology skills are also valuable.

Sample Employers

Private Sector:

- Chemonics International, Inc., www.chemonics.com
- Development Alternatives, Inc., www.dai.com
- Environmental Resources Management, www.erm.com
- ICF Consulting Group, Inc., www.icfconsulting.com

Research, Non-Profit and Non-Governmental Organizations:

- Audubon International, www.auduboninternational.org
- Conservation International, www.conservation.org
- Friends of the Earth, www.foe.org
- International Institute of Environment and Development, www.iied.org
- International Institute for Sustainable Development, www.iisd.org
- Natural Resources Defense Council, www.nrdc.org
- The Nature Conservancy, nature.org
- Research Triangle Institute, www.rti.org
- World Conservation Union, iucn.org
- World Resources Institute, www.wri.org
- Worldwide Fund for Nature, www.panda.org/
- World Wildlife Fund, www.wwf.org/

International Organizations:

- North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation, www.cec.org
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, www.oecd.org
- United Nations Development Programme, www.undp.org
- United Nations Development Programme, www.unep.org
- United Nations Industrial Development Organization, www.unido.org
- World Bank Group, www.worldbank.org
- World Trade Organization, www.wto.org

U.S. Federal Government:

- Department of Agriculture: Foreign Agricultural Service, www.fas.usda.gov
- Department of Agriculture: Forest Service, <http://www.fs.fed.us/>
- Department of Defense: Defense Environmental Network and Information Exchange, www.denix.osd.mil
- Department of Energy, www.energy.gov
- Department of Health and Human Services: Food and Drug Administration, www.fda.gov/oia/homepage.htm
- Department of the Interior, www.doi.gov/intl
- Bureau of Land Management, www.blm.gov/nhp/index.htm
- Department of State: Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, <http://www.state.gov/g/oes/>
- Environmental Protection Agency: Office of International Affairs, www.epa.gov/international/
- House Committee on Energy and Commerce, <http://energycommerce.house.gov>
- Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, <http://agriculture.senate.gov>
- Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, <http://energy.senate.gov>
- Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, <http://epw.senate.gov>

State Government:

Each state has its own department of Environmental Conservation. Example: New York State Department of Environmental Conservation is www.dec.state.ny.us/

Demand and Future Challenges of Profession

While the need for understanding of global environmental issues is great, jobs in the field are very competitive for students who are interested in domestic or international environmental careers. Prior work experience, an internship or volunteer initiative is essential. For students interested in working overseas, work in the Peace Corps or USAID, or prior experience in a domestic setting that is transferable to an international issue, like rural water distribution, is critical to a successful career search. Language skills, particularly for technical positions, are also important. Many international organizations like World Bank require a second language skill.

Positions in federal government are being privatized to increase flexibility, so networking to determine the appropriate contractors for specific policy areas is important. International organizations also hire contractors through personal and professional connections. Even non-profit and non-governmental organizations are flooded with applications for program positions.

Resources For More Information

Associations/Websites

- DevNetJobs.org, www.devnetjobs.org
- Environmental Career Opportunities, ecojobs.com (online/print newsletter)
- EnvironmentalCareer.com, www.environmentalcareer.com (online subscription service) – publisher of National Environmental Employment Report
- Environmental Careers Organization, www.eco.org
- Environmental Organization Web Directory, www.webdirectory.com
- Green Dream Jobs, sustainablebusiness.com
- Idealist, www.idealists.org
- One World, www.oneworld.net
- The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe, www.rec.org

Directories

Conservation Directory 2003: The Guide to Worldwide Environmental Organizations, National Wildlife Federation, Island Press (January 2003)

World Directory of Environmental Organizations, 6th edition, Ted Trzyna, California Institute (February 2001)

Publications

- Careers in the Environment (VGM Professional Careers Series), 2nd edition, Michael Fasulo and Paul Walker, McGraw-Hill/Contemporary Books (April 2000)
- Green at Work: Finding a Business Career that Works for the Environment, 2nd edition, Susan Cohn, Island Press (October 1995)
- The Complete Guide to Environmental Careers in the 21st Century, 3rd edition, Kevin Doyle and Environmental Careers Organization, Island Press (November 1998)

- Conservation Directory 2004: The Guide to Worldwide Environmental Organizations, by National Wildlife Federation, Island Press, (2004)

The ECO Guide to Careers that Make A Difference, The Environmental Career Organization, 2004 World Directory of Environmental Organizations, by Ted Trzyna, California Institute of Public, 6th Edition, 2001.