

## **GAS PLANT/REFINERY OPERATORS**

**Job Description:** Oil and natural gas extraction is a large industry in North Dakota. There are currently more than 20 natural gas processing plants and two oil refineries in the state with more in the planning stages. A gas plant/refinery operator distributes or processes oil or gas for a variety of consumers through the operation of sophisticated and complex processing equipment, and by controlling compressors to maintain specified pressures on pipelines. He or she monitors equipment functioning, observes temperature, level and flow gauges, and performs regular unit checks in order to ensure that all equipment is operating as it should. Other duties include:

- Controlling operation of compressors, scrubbers, evaporators, and refrigeration equipment
- Starting and shutting down plant equipment
- Recording, reviewing, and compiling operations records, test results and gauge readings such as temperatures, pressures, concentrations, and flows
- Determining the cause of abnormal pressure variance, and recommending actions to relieve overloading

Many of the skills utilized for gas plant/refinery operation can be transferred to other energy operations, including ethanol and biodiesel production.



**Needed Skills and Education:** A person interested in this career path should have well-developed skills in operation monitoring, complex problem solving, judgment and decision making, quality control analysis, and troubleshooting. The recommended education level is a minimum of a high school or GED diploma, plus on-the-job training. However, post-secondary education in process plant technology from community colleges or vocational-technical institutes will greatly improve job opportunities and pay.

**Wages:** In North Dakota, the average annual wage for a gas plant operator is \$75,210, which is considerably above the national average annual wage of \$61,090. The North Dakota average hourly wage is \$36.16 and ranges from a beginning level of \$28.29/hour to \$44.30 for experienced operators.

**Other Information:** Because of the projected increased activity in oil and gas extraction in North Dakota over the next 20 years or so, the employment outlook for gas plant operators is increasing. As other parts of the country experience growth in shale-based natural gas production, the employment outlook nationally should remain steady.

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