

CATCH 22 - GETTING THAT FIRST GOOD JOB IN THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL INDUSTRY

By Jim Jacobs

The environmental industry in California is still vibrant based on the number of calls received from new graduates wanting career opportunities. Although everyone has a resume, new hires are always calling to find out about how to break into the job market. I get several calls every week. The Catch-22 problem exists where many companies won't hire new workers without some experience. But how does a newly graduated environmental professional get that first job without experience? Here are a few ideas that might help:

Internships while in school - For college and university students, try to get that environmental internship while at school to make contacts and get some experience. Even if there is no money involved, the contacts could be well worth the effort.

Join Associations - For students, there are many good professional groups (such as Groundwater Resources Association) that one can join, usually at a reduced student rate. These meetings offer great contacts, friendships, as well as the chance to hear a good technical talk. For those wanting a job in a new area, these meetings are the best place to meet the professionals who practice in a particular technical area or location. Sometimes even the food is good. Many times, the students are given free passes to participate in these meetings. For California, check out the California Council of Geoscience Organizations (www.ccco.org) for a listing of prominent geology societies. There are also other environmental and engineering societies that encourage students.

Get here first - I get resumes from environmental professionals throughout the nation asking for a job. If you want a position in California, it would be good to set up an interview when you are in the area, if you don't already live here. Some larger firms are willing to pay for interview expenses and travel costs.

Take the required training - To make a new hire more employable to any employer, job seekers should spend their money and take the OSHA 40 Hour Hazardous Materials training. The training, required by CFR 1910.120 is given by many vendors. In fact, there are some vendors who provide the training over the web. The costs range from \$100 for Union training or City Education Extension programs to \$400 to \$800 for private firms. The internet classes are about \$400 to \$500. Some colleges and universities offer the course. Having the training will allow familiarity with the environmental field. The interviews will be much better, as the potential hire will be able to talk the language of the environmental professional. For the environmental company, the risk of hiring any new employee is huge – what if the employee doesn't work out and quits within 3 months. The OSHA Hazardous Materials training means large costs for the company: the cost of the training, the salary of the worker during the training and the delay in being able to use a new hire in the field until the training is completed. Having the training means the new employee can be billable in the field right away, making the company very happy.

Medical exams – A new hire having an occupational medical exam before the interview with any company is ready to work. The medical certificate should state that he or she is healthy, can wear a respirator and can work in the field will be able to get to work in the field. Most companies will

provide the medical exam, but if someone comes in with the forms already filled out, it shows a willingness to be prepared and move forward.

Clean driver's record - Get a California driver's license as soon as possible. Bring a copy of your driver's record with you to show a clean driver's record to the interview.

References and Letters - Bring a list of references and letters with you to the interview. For new hires, professors are a good choice, as well as summer job or internship supervisors.

Practice – Go to as many interviews as possible. Practice the questions and answers before the interview. Show up neatly dressed and groomed, with copies of the above items.

Having these items prepared for an interview will help new hires with their job search, regardless the environmental company they ultimately join. Although there are no guarantees that having all of these items will get the new hire a job, all companies in the environmental field will appreciate your skills, dedication and commitment to the environmental field if you have these items already done.

Again best wishes on your job search and see you at the local Groundwater Resources Association meetings and events! If you have any questions, please email me at augerpro@jps.net

About the author:

Jim Jacobs, CHG, is Chief Hydrogeologist for FAST-TEK Engineering Support Services. His specialty is in-situ remediation of metals, hydrocarbons and solvents. He has over 20 years of experience and is on the GRA Board of Directors.