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## Building Cleaning Workers

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(O\*NET 37-1011.00, 37-2011.00, 37-2012.00, 37-2019.99)

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### Significant Points

- This very large occupation requires few skills to enter and each year has one of the largest numbers of job openings of any occupation.
- Most job openings result from the need to replace the many workers who leave these jobs because they provide low pay and few benefits, limited opportunities for training or advancement, and often only part-time or temporary work.
- Most new jobs will occur in businesses providing janitorial and cleaning services on a contract basis.

### Nature of the Work

Building cleaning workers—including janitors, maids, housekeeping cleaners, window washers, and rug shampooers—keep office buildings, hospitals, stores, apartment houses, hotels, and residences clean, sanitary, and in good condition. Some do only cleaning, while others have a wide range of duties.

*Janitors and cleaners* perform a variety of heavy cleaning duties, such as cleaning floors, shampooing rugs, washing walls and glass, and removing rubbish. They may fix leaky faucets, empty trash cans, do painting and carpentry, replenish bathroom supplies, mow lawns, and see that heating and air-conditioning equipment works properly. On a typical day, janitors may wet- or dry-mop floors, clean bathrooms, vacuum carpets, dust furniture, make minor repairs, and exterminate insects and rodents. They may also clean snow or debris from sidewalks in front of buildings and notify management of the need for major repairs. While janitors typically perform most of the duties mentioned, cleaners tend to work for companies that specialize in one type of cleaning activity, such as washing windows.

*Maids and housekeeping cleaners* perform any combination of light cleaning duties to keep private households or commercial establishments, such as hotels, restaurants, hospitals, and nursing homes, clean and orderly. In hotels, aside from cleaning and maintaining the premises, maids and housekeeping cleaners may deliver ironing boards, cribs, and rollaway beds to guests' rooms. In hospitals, they also may wash bed frames, make beds, and disinfect and sanitize equipment and supplies with germicides. Janitors, maids, and cleaners use many kinds of equipment, tools, and cleaning materials. For one job they may need standard cleaning implements; another may require an electric floor polishing machine and a special cleaning solution. Improved building materials, chemical cleaners, and power equipment have made many tasks easier and less time consuming, but cleaning workers must learn the proper use of equipment and cleaners to avoid harming floors, fixtures, building occupants, and themselves.

*Cleaning supervisors* coordinate, schedule, and supervise the activities of janitors and cleaners. They assign tasks and

inspect building areas to see that work has been done properly; they also issue supplies and equipment and inventory stocks to ensure that supplies on hand are adequate. They may be expected to screen and hire job applicants; train new and experienced employees; and recommend promotions, transfers, or dismissals. Supervisors may prepare reports concerning the occupancy of rooms, hours worked, and department expenses. Some also perform cleaning duties.

*Cleaners and servants in private households* dust and polish furniture; sweep, mop, and wax floors; vacuum; and clean ovens, refrigerators, and bathrooms. They also may wash dishes, polish silver, and change and make beds. Some wash, fold, and iron clothes; a few wash windows. General houseworkers also may take clothes and laundry to the cleaners, buy groceries, and perform many other errands.

Building cleaning workers in large office and residential buildings, and more recently in large hotels, often work in teams consisting of workers who specialize in vacuuming, picking up trash, and cleaning restrooms, among other things. Supervisors conduct inspections to ensure that the building is cleaned properly and the team is functioning efficiently. In hotels, one member of the team is responsible for reporting electronically to the supervisor when rooms are cleaned.

**Work environment.** Because most office buildings are cleaned while they are empty, many cleaning workers work evening hours. Some, however, such as school and hospital custodians, work in the daytime. When there is a need for 24-hour maintenance, janitors may be assigned to shifts. Most full-time building cleaners work about 40 hours a week. Part-time cleaners usually work in the evenings and on weekends.

Most building cleaning workers work indoors, but some work outdoors part of the time, sweeping walkways, mowing lawns, or shoveling snow. Working with machines can be noisy, and some tasks, such as cleaning bathrooms and trash rooms, can be dirty and unpleasant. Janitors may suffer cuts, bruises, and burns from machines, handtools, and chemicals. They spend most of their time on their feet, sometimes lifting or pushing heavy furniture or equipment. Many tasks, such as dusting or sweeping, require constant bending, stooping, and stretching. Lifting the increasingly heavier mattresses at nicer hotels in order to change the linens can cause back injuries and sprains.



*Building cleaning workers often work indoors and use specialized equipment.*

## Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Most building cleaning workers, except supervisors, have a high school degree or less and mainly learn their skills on the job or in informal training sessions sponsored by their employers. Supervisors, though, generally have at least a high school diploma and often some college.

**Education and training.** No special education is required for most entry-level janitorial or cleaning jobs, but workers should be able to perform simple arithmetic and follow instructions. High school shop courses are helpful for jobs involving repair work. Most building cleaners learn their skills on the job. Beginners usually work with an experienced cleaner, doing routine cleaning. As they gain more experience, they are assigned more complicated tasks. In some cities, programs run by unions, government agencies, or employers teach janitorial skills. Students learn how to clean buildings thoroughly and efficiently; how to select and safely use various cleansing agents; and how to operate and maintain machines, such as wet and dry vacuums, buffers, and polishers. Students learn to plan their work, to follow safety and health regulations, to interact positively with people in the buildings they clean, and to work without supervision. Instruction in minor electrical, plumbing, and other repairs also may be given.

Supervisors of building cleaning workers usually need at least a high school diploma, but many have some college or more, especially those who work at places where clean rooms and well-functioning buildings are a necessity, such as in hospitals and hotels.

**Other qualifications.** Those who come in contact with the public should have good communication skills. Employers usually look for dependable, hard-working individuals who are in good health, follow directions well, and get along with other people.

**Certification and advancement.** A small number of cleaning supervisors and managers are members of the International Executive Housekeepers Association, which offers two kinds of certification programs for cleaning supervisors and managers: Certified Executive Housekeeper (CEH) and Registered Executive Housekeeper (REH). The CEH designation is offered to those with a high school education, while the REH designation is offered to those who have a 4-year college degree. Both designations are earned by attending courses and passing exams and both must be renewed every

3 years to ensure that workers keep abreast of new cleaning methods. Those with the REH designation usually oversee the cleaning services of hotels, hospitals, casinos, and other large institutions that rely on well-trained experts for their cleaning needs.

Advancement opportunities for workers usually are limited in organizations where they are the only maintenance worker. Where there is a large maintenance staff, however, cleaning workers can be promoted to supervisor or to area supervisor or manager. In many establishments, they are required to take some in-service training to improve their housekeeping techniques and procedures and to enhance their supervisory skills. A high school diploma improves the chances for advancement. Some janitors set up their own maintenance or cleaning businesses.

## Employment

Building cleaning workers held about 4.2 million jobs in 2006. More than 7 percent were self-employed.

Janitors and cleaners worked in nearly every type of establishment and held about 2.4 million jobs. They accounted for more than 57 percent of all building cleaning workers. More than 31 percent worked for firms supplying building maintenance services on a contract basis, about 20 percent were employed in public or private educational services, and 2 percent worked in hotels or motels. Other employers included hospitals; restaurants; religious institutions; manufacturing firms; government agencies; and operators of apartment buildings, office buildings, and other types of real estate.

First-line supervisors of housekeeping and janitorial workers held more than 282,000 jobs. Approximately 20 percent worked in firms supplying building maintenance services on a contract basis, while approximately 11 percent were employed in hotels or motels. About 4 percent worked for State and local governments, primarily at schools and colleges. Others worked for hospitals, nursing homes and other residential care facilities.

Maids and housekeepers held about 1.5 million jobs. Private households employed the most maids and housekeepers—almost 29 percent—while hotels, motels, and other traveler accommodations employed about the same percentage, almost 29 percent. Hospitals, nursing homes, and other residential care facilities employed large numbers, also. Although clean-

## Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Building cleaning workers .....	—	4,154,000	4,723,000	569,000	14
First-line supervisors/managers of housekeeping and janitorial workers .....	37-1011	282,000	318,000	36,000	13
Building cleaning workers .....	37-2010	3,872,000	4,405,000	533,000	14
Janitors and cleaners, except maids and housekeeping cleaners .....	37-2011	2,387,000	2,732,000	345,000	14
Maids and housekeeping cleaners .....	37-2012	1,470,000	1,656,000	186,000	13
Building cleaning workers, all other .....	37-2019	16,000	18,000	2,400	15

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

ing jobs can be found in all cities and towns, most are located in highly populated areas where there are many office buildings, schools, apartment houses, nursing homes, and hospitals.

**Job Outlook**

Overall employment of building cleaning workers is expected to grow faster than average for all occupations through 2016, as more office complexes, apartment houses, schools, factories, hospitals, and other buildings requiring cleaning are built to accommodate a growing population and economy.

**Employment change.** The number of building cleaning workers is expected to grow 14 percent between 2006 and 2016, which is faster than the average for all occupations. This occupation will have, in fact, one of the largest numbers of new jobs arise, about 570,000 over the 2006-16 period.

Much of the growth in these occupations will come from cleaning residential properties. As families become more pressed for time, they increasingly hire cleaning and handyman services to perform a variety of tasks in their homes. Also, as the population ages, older people will need to hire cleaners to help maintain their houses. In addition, housekeeping cleaners will be needed to clean the growing number of residential care facilities for the elderly. These facilities, including assisted-living residences, generally provide housekeeping services as part of the rent. Although there have been some improvements in productivity in the way buildings are cleaned and maintained—using teams of cleaners, for example, and better cleaning supplies—cleaning still is very much a labor-intensive job.

As many firms reduce costs by contracting out the cleaning and maintenance of buildings, businesses providing janitorial and cleaning services on a contract basis are expected to have the greatest number of new jobs in this field.

**Job prospects.** In addition to job openings arising due to growth, numerous openings should result from the need to replace those who leave this very large occupation each year. Limited promotion potential, low pay, and the fact that many jobs are part-time and temporary, induce many to leave the occupation, thereby contributing to the number of job openings and the need to replace these workers.

Building cleaners usually find work by answering newspaper advertisements, applying directly to organizations where they would like to work, contacting local labor unions, or contacting State employment service offices.

**Earnings**

Median annual earnings of janitors and cleaners, except maids and housekeeping cleaners, were \$19,930 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$16,220 and \$25,640. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$14,010 and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$33,060. Median annual earnings in 2006 in the industries employing the largest numbers of janitors and cleaners, except maids and housekeeping cleaners, were as follows:

Elementary and secondary schools .....	\$24,010
Local government .....	23,930
Colleges, universities, and professional schools .....	23,170
General medical and surgical hospitals.....	21,670
Services to buildings and dwellings.....	17,870

Median annual earnings of maids and housekeepers were \$17,580 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$15,060 and \$21,440. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$13,140, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$26,390. Median annual earnings in 2006 in the industries employing the largest numbers of maids and housekeepers were as follows:

General medical and surgical hospitals.....	\$20,080
Community care facilities for the elderly .....	17,900
Nursing care facilities .....	17,690
Services to buildings and dwellings.....	17,540
Traveler accommodation.....	16,790

Median annual earnings of first-line supervisors and managers of housekeeping and janitorial workers were \$31,290 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$24,230 and \$40,670. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$19,620, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$51,490. Median annual earnings in May 2006 in the industries employing the largest numbers of first-line supervisors and managers of housekeeping and janitorial workers were as follows:

Local government .....	\$38,170
Elementary and secondary schools .....	35,660
Nursing care facilities .....	30,570
Services to buildings and dwellings.....	29,730
Traveler accommodation.....	26,730

**Related Occupations**

Workers who specialize in one of the many job functions of janitors and cleaners include pest control workers; general maintenance and repair workers; and grounds maintenance workers.

**Sources of Additional Information**

Information about janitorial jobs may be obtained from State employment service offices.

For information on certification in executive housekeeping, contact:

- International Executive Housekeepers Association, Inc., 1001 Eastwind Dr., Suite 301, Westerville, OH 43081-3361. Internet: <http://www.ieha.org>