
Meter Readers, Utilities

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Significant Points

- Meter reading is one of the fastest-declining occupations, as a result of automated meter reading (AMR) systems that allow meters to be monitored and billed from a central point.
- Most meter readers are employed by electric, gas, or water utilities or by local governments.
- Many workers begin working as meter readers and advance to lineman, power plant operator, or dispatcher jobs.

Nature of the Work

Meter readers read electric, gas, water, or steam consumption meters and record the volume used. They serve both residential and commercial consumers. The basic duty of a meter reader is to walk or drive along a route and read customers' consumption from a tracking device. Accuracy is the most important part of the job, as companies rely on readers to provide the information they need to bill their customers.

Other duties include inspecting the meters and their connections for any defects or damage, supplying repair and maintenance workers with the necessary information to fix damaged meters. They keep track of customers' average usage and record reasons for any extreme fluctuations in volume. Meter readers are constantly aware of any abnormal behavior or consumption that might indicate an unauthorized connection. They may turn on service for new occupants and turn off service for questionable behavior or nonpayment of charges.

Work environment. Meter readers work outdoors in all types of weather as they travel through communities and neighbor-



Most modern meters are electronic and can be read using a remote device.

hoods taking readings. Those traveling on foot may have to walk several miles a day. Dogs can pose a difficulty for meter readers, although they are generally given precautionary devices to help them avoid encounters. Meter readers generally work 40-hour weeks, although part-time positions are available. The typical workweek is Monday through Friday.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Meter readers are entry-level utility employees. Many people start utility careers in this occupation with the goal of advancing to more responsible positions.

Education and training. Most employers prefer to hire workers who have a high school diploma. Until they demonstrate an ability to work alone, inexperienced meter readers usually work with more experienced ones. They learn how to read meters and determine consumption rates on the job and they must also learn the route that they need to travel.

Other qualifications. No experience is required for this position, but employers prefer to hire those familiar with computers and other electronic office and business equipment. Because routes may change, it is important for readers to be able to understand maps. Typing, recordkeeping and other clerical skills are also useful.

Advancement. Meter reading is generally considered an entry-level occupation. Many people start working as meter readers and move up to higher positions in the metering department. Others move on to other positions within the utility, such as dispatcher or distributor. They may also become apprentices to more skilled positions, such as lineman or electrician.

Employment

Meter readers held about 47,000 jobs in 2006. About 42 percent were employed by electric, gas, and water utilities. Most of the rest were employed in local government, reading water meters or meters for other government-owned utilities.

Job Outlook

Despite declining employment, some job openings are expected during the 2006-16 decade.

Employment change. Employment of meter readers is expected to decline by 10 percent through 2016. New AMR systems allow meters to be monitored and billed from a central point, reducing the need for meter readers.

Job prospects. It will be many years before AMR systems can be implemented in all locations, so there still will be some openings for meter readers, mainly to replace workers leaving the occupation. The utilities industry is expecting a large number of retirements from its aging workforce, which should create many job opportunities.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of utility meter readers in May 2006 were \$30,330. The middle 50 percent earned between \$23,580 and \$39,320. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$18,970, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$49,150. Employee benefits vary greatly between companies and may not be offered for part-time workers. If uniforms are required, employers generally provide them or offer an allowance to purchase them.

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Meter readers, utilities	43-5041	47,000	42,000	-4,800	-10

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*.

Related Occupations

Other workers responsible for the distribution and control of utilities include line installers and repairers, and power plant operators, distributors, and dispatchers.

Sources of Additional Information

Information about job opportunities may be obtained from local utilities and offices of State employment services, and from:

► International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, 1125 15th St.NW., Washington, DC 20005.

Internet: <http://www.ibew.org>