



California Occupational Guides

Guide for



Recycling Center Operators in California

May also be called: Material Sorters; Recycle Workers; Recycling Sorters; Refuse Laborers; Sorters

Specialties within this occupation include: Metal Sorters

What Would I Do?

Recycling Center Operators help in the reduction of refuse in landfills and incinerators, thus decreasing various sources of pollution. Recycling Center Operators receive and sort through a number of different materials depending on the type of recycle/refuse center they work in. They turn used products into useful, environmentally safe raw materials. The different types of materials they sort into appropriate containers include: paper, glass, plastic, concrete, drywall, wood, and high-grade metals like copper, brass, and aluminum.

Some facilities separate the Recycling Center Operator occupation into three positions: sorters, operators, and maintenance technicians. Each requires knowledge concentrated in a specific area of recycling centers. Sorters divide the materials into groups of similar products. Operators run the equipment and machinery for recycling and receive a higher wage than do sorters. Maintenance technicians require the largest knowledge base and are in charge of maintaining the equipment.

Recycling Center Operators must perform moderately heavy physical labor and notice malfunctions of surrounding equipment. They must be able to see and read instructions, manuals, reports, scale meters, and other documents.

Metal Sorters prepare metal scraps for machines to further process and melt them to a more basic form for recycling. They may use torches and saws to cut up used metal and other materials for processing.

Tools and Technology

Depending on the project, Recycling Center Operators might use brooms, mops, saws, scales, squeegees, and torches. They may also operate balers, tractors, forklifts, bucket and front end loaders, and wood grinder/chipper equipment.

Important Tasks and Related Skills

A formal survey to determine specific skills requirements for Recycling Center Operators has yet to be completed. Therefore, the sample skills shown below are common in many of the job listings for Recycling Center Operators.

Task	Skill Used in this Task
Inspect mechanical and safety gear daily.	Troubleshooting
Report problems with mechanical equipment and fill out any required reports.	Equipment Maintenance
Unload, sort, weigh, record, and load containers/equipment with a variety of recycled materials.	Multi-limb Coordination
Package the recycling material and arrange it for shipment or delivery.	Management of Material Resources
Bale recycled materials, and set up boxes on pallets.	Trunk Strength
Service/lubricate balers, forklifts, and other mechanical units.	Mechanical
Operate forklift, wheel loader, wood grinder/chipper, bucket loader, and utility loader.	Rate Control
Uphold a clean and safe work environment in compliance with Occupational Safety and Health Association (OSHA) standards.	Public Safety and Security
Assist customers and drivers to correct loading/unloading areas.	Customer and Personal Service

Sources: U.S. Department of Labor [Occupational Information Network \(O*NET\)](http://online.onetcenter.org) at online.onetcenter.org and The Conference Board Help Wanted OnLine™(HWOL) data series.

Working Conditions

Being a Recycling Center Operator can be demanding because one has to stand for extended periods of time. The job also requires above average physical agility, hand-eye and foot coordination, and manual dexterity. Much of the work is performed by Operators in loud, odorous, dusty, and dirty locations with some fumes from machinery, equipment, and other vehicles.

All recycling centers have strict safety procedures that must be followed to minimize risk. Recycling Center Operators are occasionally exposed to hazards including chemical burns, disposable needles, broken glass, falling objects from overloaded containers, and diseases that may accompany solid waste. They may also be exposed to garbage/refuse, treated and untreated wastewater, as well as various chemicals, solvents, oils, paints, and other agents. Most employers require and supply safety gear, such as masks, gloves, and ear plugs to be worn at all times to protect from injury and various contaminants.

Recycling Center Operators should be able to stand, walk, sit, climb, bend, kneel, reach, push, pull, twist, and perform other similar movements for long periods of time. Operators may lift and carry materials that could weigh up to 75 pounds depending on location.

Operators typically work 5 days a week for 40 to 70 hours with varying days off. Shifts often range from 8-12 hours in length with frequent overtime.

Many Recycling Center Operators are members of labor unions, such as the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

Will This Job Fit Me?

The job of Recycling Center Operator may appeal to those who enjoy work activities involving practical, hands-on problems and solutions. This occupation might interest those who are attentive to detail and thorough in completing work tasks.

A Recycling Center Operator should have good communication skills in order to educate individuals about recycling. In addition, a Recycling Center Operator should have the willingness to handle material that is considered unpleasant to most. Operators should be comfortable working with and around large machinery. Operators with a positive attitude are also favored by employers.

What Wages and Benefits Can I Expect?

Wages

A formal salary survey is not available; however, job ads reflect annual salaries ranging from \$17,000 to \$28,000. Hourly wages range from \$8 to \$15.45 per hour. All salaries depend on the pay structure established by each employer for work performed, the nature of the project, and the skill of the operators. Generally, workers in large cities earn higher wages than those who work in small towns and rural areas.

Benefits

Recycling Center Operators who work full time typically receive medical, dental, and vision insurance and optional 401(k) retirement plans.

What is the Job Outlook?

As this is an emerging occupation, the number of Recycling Center Operators in California is unknown at this time. Employment opportunities may increase in the future considering society's growing interest and awareness of environmental protection.

How Do I Qualify?

Education, Training, and Other Requirements

Recycling Center Operator is an entry-level position with skills typically learned on the job. Operators will also need to complete company-sponsored seminars on safety to comply with Occupational Safety and Health Association (OSHA) standards. Most Operators should have a high school diploma or equivalent and a valid California Driver License.

Many Operators start out as handlers to learn the material differences and sorting process. As part of the sorting process, Operators must learn and be familiar with the California Refund for beverage containers and other recyclable products. Over time they will learn to use specific equipment while on the job.

Experience

Some employers prefer Recycling Center Operators to have previous experience in mechanical or forklift operation, heavy equipment maintenance and repair, knowledge of different metals, or trash collection work. Despite these preferences, the previously listed experiences can be obtained through on-the-job training.

Early Career Planning

High school preparation courses in English, mathematics, and wood/metal shop are helpful for students interested in Recycling Center Operator occupations. Operators should have some accounting and readable handwriting skills.

Where Can I Find Training?

There are currently no training providers offering courses related to this occupation, however, there are two ways to search for training information at www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/?Pageid=1013:

- [Search by Field of Study](#) to find what programs are available and what schools offer those programs.
- [Search by Training Provider](#) to find schools by name, type of school, or location.

Contact the schools you are interested in to learn about the classes available, tuition and fees, and any prerequisite course work.

Where Would I Work?

According to the 2009 *California Green Economy Survey*, the majority of Recycling Center Operators are employed in industries related to wholesale and retail trade. Examples of these industries include supermarkets and recycling centers. Other industries employing Recycling Center Operators are Food Services and Drinking Places, Waste Management and Remediation Services, and Administrative and Support Services such as Temporary Help Services.

Finding a Job

Direct application to employers is one of the most effective job search methods. Jobs may also be found through classified advertisements in newspapers and online job boards. **Online job opening systems** include JobCentral at www.jobcentral.com and CalJOBSSM at www.caljobs.ca.gov.

To find your nearest One-Stop Career Center, go to [Service Locator](#) at www.servicelocator.org. View the [helpful job search tips](#) at www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/occguides/JobSearchTips.pdf for more resources. (requires [Adobe Reader](#)).

Yellow Page Headings

You can focus your local job search by checking employers listed online or in your local telephone directory. Below are some suggested headings where you might find employers of Recycling Center Operators.

- Garbage Collection
- Landfill
- Recycling
- Recycling Centers
- Recycling Equipment & Services
- Waste Management
- Waste Recycling & Disposal Service & Equipment

Find Possible Employers

To locate a list of employers in your area, use "Find Employers" on the LaborMarketInfo Web site at www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/aspdotnet/databrowsing/empMain.aspx?menuChoice=emp.

- Select the search for employers by occupation.
- Select a geographic area.
- Search for an occupation by keyword, occupation, or category.
- Select one of the top industries that employ the occupation.
- This will give you a list of employers in that industry in your area.
- Click on "View Filter Selections" to limit your list to specific cities or employer size.
- Click on an employer for the street address, telephone number, size of business, Web site, etc.

Contact the employer for possible employment.

Where Could This Job Lead?

Operators may advance to supervisory positions in a related area of the recycling process or may enter into other related positions, such as Refuse and Recyclable Material Collectors. This is an entry-level position; therefore, with greater experience in the field, Operators can enter occupations with greater responsibility in the handling of recycled products.

Related Occupations

Below is a list of occupations related to Recycling Center Operators.

- Recycling and Reclamation Workers (51-9199.01)
- Refuse and Recyclable Material Collectors (53-7081.00)

Other Sources

- Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle)
www.calrecycle.ca.gov
- U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA)
www.osha.gov
- International Brotherhood of Teamsters
www.teamster.org
- Material Handling Industry of America
www.mhia.org
- Warehousing Education and Research Council (WERC)
www.werc.org

These links are provided for your convenience and do not constitute an endorsement by EDD.

For the Career Professional

The following codes are provided to assist counselors, job placement workers, or other career professionals.

System	Code
SOC – Standard Occupational Classification at www.bls.gov/soc	N/A
O*NET – Occupational Information Network at online.onetcenter.org	N/A

The California Occupational Guides are a product of:
The California Employment Development Department
Labor Market Information Division
www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov

Revised: 8/26/2011

This workforce solution was funded by a grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. The solution was created by the grantee and does not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Department of Labor. The Department of Labor makes no guarantees, warranties, or assurances of any kind, express or implied, with respect to such information, including any information on linked sites and including, but not limited to, accuracy of the information or its completeness, timeliness, usefulness, adequacy, continued availability, or ownership. This solution is copyrighted by the institution that created it. Internal use by an organization and/or personal use by an individual for non-commercial purposes is permissible. All other uses require the prior authorization of the copyright owner.