WHAT IS INDUSTRIAL HYGIENE?
Industrial hygiene is the anticipation, recognition, evaluation, and control of workplace environmental factors that may affect the health, comfort, or productivity of the worker. Industrial hygiene is considered a science, but it is also an art that involves judgment, creativity, and human interaction. Although some occupations may appear more dangerous than others, potential short-term and long-term health hazards affect everyone from bankers to construction workers. Industrial hygienists play an important role in ensuring that the workplace is as free from hazards as possible and that workers and the community at large are protected from potential health threats.

ONE PROFESSION WITH MANY OPTIONS
Job diversity is a major benefit to consider when choosing a career in the environmental health and safety arena. Industrial hygienists are not limited to one particular type of industry; they are employed in a variety of organizations such as:

- Public utilities
- Colleges and universities
- Insurance companies
- Labor unions
- Research laboratories
- Consulting firms
- Manufacturing companies
- Hazardous waste companies
- Government
- Chemical companies
- Hospitals

Many industrial hygienists work for private corporations or federal or state government agencies as salaried employees. However, the fastest-growing segment of the industrial hygiene profession is self-employment or consulting. Many industrial hygiene careers can lead to upper management positions, as the industrial hygienist’s job is a multifaceted one that touches every aspect of an organization and benefits a business’s bottom line through increased productivity, improved morale, and lower workers’ compensation and liability costs. The industrial hygienist acts as an adviser, making recommendations and setting standards to keep the workplace safe. This calls for working with employees at all job levels and requires a genuine commitment to caring about people and the environment.

BECOMING AN INDUSTRIAL HYGIENIST

EDUCATION
Industrial hygienists generally prepare for their careers by pursuing an undergraduate degree in industrial hygiene or one of the sciences, such as engineering, chemistry, or biology. Many continue on to attain a master’s or doctoral degree in industrial hygiene. Some colleges offer a one- to three-year associate’s degree and a certificate program that qualifies students as industrial hygiene technicians. A technician assists industrial hygienists and other occupational health and safety professionals in gathering and analyzing data and ensuring that programs and regulations are enforced.

CERTIFICATION
After you have worked in the industrial hygiene field for four years, you are eligible for certification. To become certified, you must take a comprehensive one-day certification exam. When the exam is passed and all requirements are met, an industrial hygienist becomes a certified industrial hygienist, also known as a CIH. To maintain certification, the industrial hygienist participates in continuing education programs. The certification process distinguishes an industrial hygienist and also advances the profession in general.

THE BOTTOM LINE: SALARY AND OTHER BENEFITS OF AN INDUSTRIAL HYGIENE CAREER
If you are a self-starter who takes pride in your work and cares about people and the environment, industrial hygiene may be the career for you. Because the field is so diverse, industrial hygienists are able to choose among many types of work. Plus, there is always the opportunity to become a consultant or start your own business if total employment freedom is your goal. The salary you earn, of course, depends on many things, including education, tenure, and certification. The following figures are based on the 2008 AIHA Salary Survey. For example, as of January 1, 2008, 25% of the respondents earned $81,000 or less, and 25% earned $120,000 or more. The average mean salary for all respondents was $94,947. The median was $90,000, and the maximum was $375,000.