

A career in drilling — is it for you?



What's it all about?

If you like working with your hands and being outdoors, then why not consider a career in the drilling industry?

For people who like to mix a bit of adventure into their lifestyle and make a decent living whilst doing it, it can be an excellent career choice. The job opportunities are varied and can go from entry level positions through to management or even owning your own business.

Drilling is about using specialised equipment to drill a hole into the ground, which could be used for many different purposes. It could be in exploration to prove up a new gold mine, it could be to drill a water bore for a station owner to provide water for their stock, or to drill investigation holes on a construction project.

Sounds simple but is often more complex and challenging than this and requires skills that are largely learned on the job over many years.

Here are some answers to key questions that someone weighing up a drilling career could be thinking.



Q&A with ADIA

What are the career prospects like?

People starting out in the drilling industry do so in an offsider position, sometimes also called a driller's helper or assistant. This is where you learn how the operation works and what the different pieces of the drilling system do. To become competent at this would likely take somewhere around 12 months working on the job.

Offsiders who show the right temperament and can demonstrate that they are ready to go to the next level, could transition from there into a trainee driller role. The longer you stay in the drilling industry and gain experience, the more career prospects you will have. Drillers can upskill to supervisor roles, operations management and even one day owning their own drill rig.

How old do I need to be?

One of the job requirements expected of a driller's offsider is to drive the trucks that are used to mobilise the equipment to and from site. Therefore, the requirement to do this and gain a HV drivers' license is to be 21 years old. If you are not yet 21, then there is always the option of working in underground or even geotechnical drilling where all that is usually needed is to have competency in driving a 4WD vehicle.

Can females apply?

Absolutely! With the increase of women within the industry, all sites now facilitate women being on site across both mining and exploration camps. Stereotypically and historically, drilling has been labelled a male industry but the number of women joining the industry is constantly increasing and is very much encouraged. It is still a physical job, however with automated systems in place it has become less physically demanding but still just as rewarding.

How much will I get paid?

The pay is very good and one of the reasons why many people want to work in the industry in the first place. There is a base salary amount and then allowances for shift and overtime and anything else applicable.

Most employers tend to bundle everything together into an annual salary which covers off on all the various requirements. There are often opportunities to earn additional salary through bonuses based around things like production and safety.

Will I have to travel away from home?

Quite a lot of exploration drilling is done in remote locations which means that travel is often required. If for example you are living in Perth and are going to be working on a mine site in the Pilbara, you will need to work on a roster system.

There are employment situations where you can go home each night, and this could be when working in a different sector such as waterwell, geotechnical, or civil drilling. These operations often take place near a major city or regional town.

If I need to work away, how long will it be for?

A common roster system would be two weeks onsite and one week back home on break. There are variations on this which require more or less time onsite with a proportionate allowance for break-time.

Who pays for the living costs when away?

This is covered by the employer, and you would only need to allow for any personal items. Conditions include



a comfortable airconditioned room, plenty of healthy food, great camp facilities including Wi-Fi and phone coverage, allowing employees to be able to communicate with family and friends back at home.

What are the work hours?

Often drilling involves working 12-hour shifts and this could be consecutive days for the time you are at site. It could be day shift, night shift, or alternating between the two.

Will I get any training before I start work?

People new to drilling start in supervised, entry level roles to learn the processes involved. This is best done on the job, however there will usually be some form of induction beforehand. This would involve some basic training in skills such as driving, safety and other job procedures.

How long will I have to wait before starting my qualifications?

This will be made clear to you upfront by your prospective employer. Generally, you would be expected to work a minimum of three months before starting your Certificate II in drilling. Some companies will want you

to work longer than this to ensure that you are going to stick around before they get you enrolled and started.

Will I need to get drug and alcohol tested?

For safety reasons, the simple answer to this one is yes! You will likely need to do so as part of the application and screening phase and then at the workplace on a regular basis.

As there is a lot of large machinery being used, how safe is it working in the drilling industry?

Drilling is a very safe occupation when job procedures are followed. The equipment that you will work on is designed with many built-in features to protect and safeguard personnel. Site rules are comprehensive to protect workers to ensure that they go about their work in a safe manner. Looking out for your mates is always encouraged.

Are there other job roles available in the drilling industry?

Drilling companies need fitters and mechanics, electricians and boilermakers for equipment service and maintenance requirements.

To start out in these roles requires undertaking a more formalised apprenticeship that can take three to four years. When completed, the tradesperson then has the choice of working in a home base workshop or elect to work at the jobsite.

The tradespeople who choose to work at the jobsite usually work the same rosters as the drilling crew. In recognition of this extra time on the job, the salaries on offer are quite a bit higher compared with those at home base. ➔

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Next steps...

IF WORKING IN THE DRILLING INDUSTRY appeals to you, the approach would be to respond to an advertisement for drillers offshoots which could come direct from a drilling company or through a recruitment agency.

There are also recruitment companies who specialise in drilling and provide pre-employment training, which is a great way of increasing your prospects of employment as they will then place you with a reputable drilling contractor. 📍

Summing up!

PEOPLE CONSIDERING A CAREER IN THE DRILLING industry need to be aware that days on site are long and can be tiring. The work is outdoors and done in whatever the prevailing weather conditions are.

If in a remote location, it can also involve working for several weeks straight without a day off. This takes a bit of getting used to and therefore is not for everyone.

Those who stick it out enjoy the benefit of the extended time off they get back at home, which allows them to enjoy family and recreational activities which would not be possible in a regular five-day week job.

Drilling does offer a career and one that allows learning on the job, complimented by industry courses for gaining nationally recognised qualifications. Offshoots can complete a Certificate II, which then allows them to progress onto getting their Certificate III in drilling.

Many jobsites require certification as a condition of employment and therefore drilling contractors will support new employees on their pathway to achieving qualifications.

There are further certification levels for drillers aspiring to be supervisors and managers. Many people who enter the drilling industry at an early age make it a career for life.

There are some who are happy to get to driller or supervisor level and remain there, and then there are others who go onto senior management roles or even owning their own drilling company. 📍

ADIA can also assist with details of companies that you may like to contact.

To be taken to the Careers page on our website, where we have videos and other information, scan the QR code or drop us a line at info@ADIA.com.au



Agencies specialising in drilling recruitment and pre-employment training:

