

MISSION-CRITICAL PROFILE

Name: Joe Cardera

Organization: North Coast County Water District

Job Category (Check one below):



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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Water Treatment | <input type="checkbox"/> Electronic Maintenance Technician/ Instrument Technician |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Water Distribution | <input type="checkbox"/> Electrician/Electrical Line Worker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wastewater Treatment | <input type="checkbox"/> Machinist/Mechanic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wastewater Distribution | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

1. Please describe the work you do:

I have experience in operating, construction, maintaining and repairing a distribution system with pipe sizes ranging from 3/4-inch through 36-inch diameters. I have had the good fortune of working on all kinds of projects, including ones involving earth work, corrosion studies, constructing retaining walls, and many others. Each day is different, and working for a smaller water district I am exposed to a wide variety of daily tasks such as: meter reading, changing meters, installing water mains, plumbing, general construction, regulator repair and service, emergency leak repair, tank maintenance, installing fire hydrants, performing fire flow tests, pump station maintenance, operating heavy equipment, transporting equipment, easement clearing, and maintaining our properties.

Also, customer service is critical in this industry and therefore an important component of my job. Interacting with the public is also an important aspect of being a water distribution worker. Because we have a public image to uphold and maintain we work very hard to have our work be a positive reflection on ourselves.

2. What combination of education, vocational training, apprenticeship, experience, and/or skill did you obtain in order to be qualified and selected for your job?

I got into this field with no experience and no qualifications. I was a part time student who was bussing tables at a local restaurant. Someone told me that the Water District was hiring, so I figured I would apply not really knowing what I was getting myself into. I had no previous experience in the water industry and learned all my skill from on-the-job training and certification courses. I was initially hired as a part-time intern and then hired as a full-time employee.

I am now a Utility Maintenance Worker II at North Coast County Water District (NCCWD). I currently possess a Distribution Operator License – Grade 4, a Treatment Operator License – Grade 2 and a Commercial Driver’s License – Class A.

I also have a Bachelor of Arts Degree – Urban Studies and Planning from San Francisco State University.

While my write-up demonstrates that you don't have to have much of an education or any experience to get into the water industry, the more you have the better. Also, a formal education will undoubtedly offer you more career advancement opportunities that much sooner. You really can't go wrong with going to school or going back to school, but that's true for everyone in every industry, and the water industry is no exception. For example, by having completed a course or two from the California State University, Sacramento – Office of Water Programs you will show that you are interested in getting into this industry for something other than the pay or the benefits. These courses also will help you gain valuable insight into the industry, and are very helpful in preparing you to take the certification tests the State Health Department requires for water treatment and distribution operators.

3. What do you like best about your job?

The best part of being a Water Distribution Operator is that each day is different. This is important to me because it makes my job more enjoyable because I am never bored. I also work with a great group of people in this District which makes my job that much more enjoyable. There are so many different jobs that are included in this type of service that the work days simply fly by. Working in this industry allows me to spend most of my time working outside and usually in different areas of the District.

4. Please tell us about the projects and activities you have enjoyed most in your work in the water/wastewater field, and what made them rewarding?

A component to my personal growth can directly be attributed to my having spent a significant number of hours working with my coworkers on emergency repairs. We do whatever it takes to get the water service restored in the shortest time possible and in the safety manner possible. With that said, the work is often dangerous and hard, but that has only added to making me who I am today.

5. What qualities and capabilities are needed in order for a person in your area of expertise to be successful in the water/wastewater industry?

I have grown as a person and employee in the four years in the industry and have learned a lot about myself in this time. This career path has given me a thorough appreciation for the power of teamwork and has instilled a dedication in me to both the District and to the people it serves.

A successful Distribution Operator must have a strong work ethic and be willing to respond to any challenge regardless if it's during the normal work day, at night, weekends, holidays, rain or shine. As mentioned previously, the ability to work in a team is also an important quality a person should have because all of the work that is done involves more than just one person. While firefighters and police officers are often viewed as the epitome of public servants saving lives, and while they most certainly put their lives on the line for the public, those involved in the treatment and distribution of water are, in my opinion, some of the real unsung heroes of civil service and are amongst the biggest contributors to illness prevention, health and safety in our society. However, most people take water, where it comes from and how it gets to homes and businesses for granted, but that's okay. That means that I'm doing my job. Being a Water Distribution Operator is a very rewarding job because I know that without water there would be no need for police and fire or any other job for that matter because there would be no people. Water is just that important.

6. Do you have any advice for an individual who is considering pursuing a career in your field in the water/wastewater industry?

Working in the water industry is a great career. Distribution work can provide you with a very stable and steady job. The pay can be excellent; you will likely receive medical and dental insurance; and if you work for a public agency, the retirement benefits can be excellent - but you really do have to work hard and under miserable circumstances at times in exchange for these benefits. From my perspective, this is a very fair trade. I would highly recommend that you at least consider this industry if you're looking to either get started on a career, or if you are looking for a seriously legitimate career change.