



MISSION-CRITICAL PROFILE

Name: Jason Fernandes

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 work for a smaller district consisting of no more than ten utility workers. Because we have a limited workforce, we are all responsible for maintaining every aspect of the district. In just the past year I have done everything from installing new water meters and fire hydrants, helped design and build a supplementary pump system from the ground up, operated heavy machinery to lay new ductile iron water mains ranging from 4" up to 24" in diameter, re-graded tank sites and access roads, formed up and constructed an 8' tall by 100' long steel beamed reinforced concrete retaining wall, repaired numerous water main breaks, painted water tanks, worked in customer service, and even read meters.

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 industry by pure luck. I had just moved back home from San Diego, was short on money and in need of *any* job. I knew nothing about the water industry but a family friend had told me they were hiring summer interns. I applied, and was lucky enough to get the job. After a six- month internship, I was hired as a permanent employee and have been working here ever since. I am probably going to be your best example of someone who has had to learn everything from scratch. My only two previous jobs were delivering pizzas and pushing carts at Costco. I came into this field with no previous knowledge or skills of any kind but was willing to do the work and learn from those around me who had the knowledge and the experience needed to succeed. I've worked in the water industry for five years now and have my Distribution Operator License – Grade 4, Treatment Operator License – Grade 2I and Commercial Drivers' License – Class A.

Any quality or capability you can bring to the table will somehow benefit you in this industry. Whether it's plumbing, welding, auto repair, electrical, construction, carpentry, or any other trade, your skills and capabilities will be used somehow, someday.

Being physically fit is an essential quality because some days will require you to do hard manual labor, like hand digging or mixing concrete and, trust me, if you are out of shape, it will show. To be mechanically gifted or good with tools can only be to your benefit. Another important quality is to be able to work in and with a group. Most of the jobs we do require multiple people so it is essential to be able to work and communicate as a team. This is important for being productive, being safe and also just to make the job enjoyable for everyone. Having the ability

to think and problem solve is a great quality and you can't ever believe how far it can take you in this industry. Finding a more efficient and safe way of doing any job is a problem we are constantly trying to solve. In my opinion, the most important quality you can have is to take pride in your work. Most of the work we do takes place in the public eye, and we serve the public, so going out of your way to make not only you but the district look good is very important.

3. What do you like best about your job?

The pay is good, the retirement and benefits are great, and the need for potable water isn't going anywhere, so the job security is there. This is not an industry that will fade away with time but an industry that will only expand with a growing population. The thing I like best about this job is that I can honestly say that I really do like my job. How many people can say that? I mean there are days where I would rather be sitting on a beach in Hawaii, but in reality I have no problem getting up and going to work every day. I love working outdoors, and I think the ability to work and interact with coworkers while doing a job seems to make days go by much faster. The satisfaction of knowing you and, even more so, as a crew accomplished something to the best of your ability is a good feeling. Whether it's an emergency leak in the middle of the night or working a twelve-hour day to make sure the customers have water again, hard work seems to give off a certain satisfaction that you won't find in every job.

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?

Fortunately in this job there is no such thing as a typical day. This industry gives you an amazing number of opportunities to work in so many different aspects of the field. But this is also the part of the job that I appreciate the most. Everyday seems to bring something a little different and with that a new challenge. The job allows you to both think and learn about new things daily. I have been working in this industry for only five years now and cannot believe the knowledge and capabilities I have gained in such a short amount of time; from not knowing the difference between a crescent and an open-end wrench to being able to operate excavators and bulldozers. If you are willing to pay attention and have the desire to learn, success in this industry is inevitable.

However, success is also not just going to be handed to you, and I'm not going to lie, some days are a lot more brutal than others. If you have no desire to do hard manual labor or are not the type of person who likes to get dirty, this is not going to be the job for you. Jackhammering is not fun and being at the bottom of a mud filled trench trying to fix a leaking pipe is dangerous. We work on busy streets and most of the material we use tends to be dangerously heavy so being focused and paying attention at all times is mandatory. The job definitely has its highs and its lows, but at the end of the day, what job doesn't?

The nature of underground construction is such that people never really get to see what we've built. The vast majority of the distribution system that I operate runs under streets, up and down hill sides, and the like. With that said, I guess my favorite activities are ones that involve things like earthwork to prepare a site for a tank, the construction of retaining walls, and designing and building pump stations because at the end of the day you can actually stand back and admire what you've done.

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?

Like any job, the more education and experience you have the better off you are. A college degree is better than a high school degree and a high school degree is better than nothing. Whatever you can bring to the table can only help. I guess it really depends on what you want to do in this industry. We have everything from engineers to

janitors, from accountants to mechanics, from meter readers to general managers. The opportunities are there, but you need to find which one is right for you. If you're trying to get a job as a distribution operator the best advice I can give is to get your distribution and treatment state-certified licenses. You can find all the information you need to obtain these, including the application, on the California Department of Public Health website. Cal State Sacramento has an Office of Water Programs that offers various take-home classes. These classes will give you both a crash course of the industry and if nothing else will show employers you are interested in this field and willing to learn.

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

If this sounds like an industry that is right for you and you are willing to do the work and make the effort, then do **whatever it takes** to get in. It is an industry that always seems to be hiring and at the least accepting applications. Check online, fill out applications, stop by offices, call agencies direct, get your licenses, and take the necessary classes. All of this will give you more options and can only better your chances of landing what I believe to be a great career.

The link for the information on Distribution and Treatment Licenses:

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/certlic/occupations/Pages/DWopcert.aspx>

The link for Sacramento State Water Programs:

<http://www.cce.csus.edu/programs/waterprograms.htm>