

Common Hiring Practices at Electric & Natural Gas Utilities

Jobs in the energy industry offer numerous benefits, including competitive salaries, opportunities to work in non-traditional environments, upward mobility, and the satisfaction of making a positive contribution to the community.

While every company has its own process for evaluating and hiring new employees, a number of practices are standard across the industry. This document outlines common expectations of new hires.

Drug Testing

Drug testing is standard practice for energy companies. This is typically done after an offer has been accepted. Employment is contingent upon passing the drug test.

Background Security Checks

Background checks are also standard practice for energy companies. Employment is likewise contingent upon passing a background check to ensure applicants don't carry a criminal record.

Pre-employment Testing

The Edison Electric Institute, the trade association for investor-owned utilities, has developed a series of employment tests that are widely used in the industry. These tests are designed to assess an applicant's aptitude in subject areas such as mathematics, reading comprehension and spatial reasoning. The tests must be taken in person during a scheduled date and time.

Many companies offer applicants practice testing. EEI provides scoring of the tests.

EEI has developed the following set of standardized employment skills tests:

Support and Administrative Selection System (SASS)

These are used for a wide variety of administrative jobs, such as receptionist, mailroom employee, secretary, inventory manager, executive secretary and business analyst. They consist of five test batteries: Basic Keyboard Skills; Data Entry/Database Work Sample; Spreadsheet; Word Processing; and Simulation.

Construction and Skilled Trades Selection System (CAST)

This comprehensive battery predicts candidates' probability of success in jobs with Transmission and Distribution; Facilities and Repair; Other Facilities jobs, such as Carpenter; Electrical Repair; Machining and Vehicle Repair; and Meter Service and Repair. The tests include Graphic Arithmetic; Reading for Comprehension; and Mathematical Usage.

Plant Operator Selection System (POSS)

These tests are used to select candidates for operating jobs in fossil, nuclear, or hydro power plants. Batteries include Reading Comprehension; Mechanical Concepts; Mathematical Usage; Spatial Ability; and Tables and Graphs.

Power Plant Maintenance Positions Selection System (MASS)

These tests predict success in jobs such as Mechanic, Machinist, Electrician, Welder, Pipefitter, Steelworker and Rigger; Instrument and Control Repairer; and Helper, Painter, or Installation Worker. They can be used to select candidates for maintenance positions in fossil, nuclear or hydro power plants. Tests include Reading Comprehension; Mechanical Concepts; Spatial Ability; and Mathematical Usage.

Technical Occupations Selection System (Tech)

These aptitude tests aid in the selection of candidates for electric utility industry technical occupations for which an associate's degree is typically required. The battery includes sections on Graphic Problem Solving; Interpreting Diagrams; Mechanical Concepts; and Reasoning from Rules.

System Operator/Power Dispatching Positions (SO/PD) Selection System

These tests, meant to evaluate applicants for jobs in energy control centers of electric utilities, include sections on Applied Arithmetic; Electrical Concepts; Mathematical Usage; Numerical Reasoning; and Verbal Reasoning.

Meter Reading Aptitude Battery (MRAB)

This short test, used to select employees whose job requires reading company meters and recording data, includes two sections: Using Tables and Coding.

Customer Service Representative Test Battery (CSR)

These tests evaluate skills for positions dealing with the public at company call centers or public payment offices. The battery has two sections: Basic Work Station and Customer Order.

Online Applications

All energy companies post job opportunities on their websites. Applying online has also become standard for the industry. Initial screening for qualifications is handled through this process; the best applicants are then contacted by phone or email and asked to continue to the next step.

Health Screening

Some companies require pre-placement health exams for positions that may have certain physical activity requirements. Companies cannot discriminate against people with disabilities, and are required to make reasonable accommodations. However, some positions might preclude people with physical limitations from doing the work required of certain skilled trade jobs.

Interviewing

Most energy companies use an interviewing technique called Behavioral or Competency-Based Interviewing. This means that applicants will be asked questions specifically geared toward determining whether they have the knowledge, skills and personal attributes necessary to succeed in a specific job. Candidates will be asked for specific examples of how their personal characteristics have allowed them to meet challenges relevant to the position being sought.

Education

Education requirements vary by position. However, all positions require a minimum of a high school diploma or a GED. Some positions, such as those in engineering, require a four-year degree. Others, such as lineworkers, technicians, pipelayers/pipefitters, and power plant operators require a high school diploma. Math and reading skills, in particular, are important for all energy-related jobs.

Benefits

Energy companies offer some of the best benefits available in the business world. If you are employed by an energy company, you can expect to receive healthcare and life insurance benefits, including flexible spending account options, vision, dental and mental health; retirement and pension plans; flexible schedules and opportunities for advancement.