



Jobs

America's Best Paying Blue-Collar Jobs

Klaus Kneale, 06.10.09, 6:59 PM ET

It's a hard time for almost everyone right now, but it's especially hard for workers who don't have a college education. In 2008 the unemployment rate was 9% for people with less than a high school diploma, 5.7% for high school graduates, 2.8% for college graduates and 2% for people with doctorates. Those numbers are all worse now, but they show that blue collar workers have been especially hard hit.

Still, there are blue-collar jobs out there in high enough demand to pay surprisingly well. We've put together a list of the 20 best paying ones. The numbers used for the list are drawn from the government's Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates. They are based on data from 2008.

[In Pictures: America's Best-Paying Blue Collar Jobs](#)

Topping the list are elevator installers and repairers, who earn an average of \$32.57 an hour. That's \$12 more per hour than the national average for all jobs, and it amounts to about \$67,750 a year, far above the national salary average of \$42,270. Every job on this list earns more than the national average.

Signal and track switch repairers for the railroad industry, who rank 20th on the list, make \$49,060 a year, just beating out tool makers and brickmasons.

"Blue-collar" is not a technical term. The dictionary defines it as "wage earners, especially as a class, whose jobs are performed in work clothes and often involve manual labor." We based our selection of jobs on that definition, excluding workers in highly managerial roles, who largely supervise the work of others, or whose uniforms are, say, Major League baseball uniforms.

Of course, blue-collar work does not mean unskilled work. Many of these jobs, especially the highest paid ones, require extensive training, both in schools and in apprenticeships. These apprenticeships can take as much as four or five years.

Transportation inspectors came in third on our list, but they are the only job here that averages six figures at the 90th percentile of payees. They therefore also appear on our list of [Surprising Six-Figure Jobs](#). Elevator installers and repairers and commercial divers both come close. They each make \$97,000 a year at the 90th percentile.

Railroading is the industry that appears most often on the list. Five jobs in the field make the cut, including subway and streetcar operators. Locomotive engineers do the best, pulling down an average of \$25.71 an hour.

A high school diploma and four or five years of training may sound like a lot, but remember, that's usually on-the-job training, which can help keep a roof over your head while you work your way up--rather than get you tens of thousands of dollars in debt, as going to college does for so many.

[In Pictures: America's Best-Paying Blue Collar Jobs](http://www.forbes.com/2009/06/10/paying-blue-collar-leadership-jobs_print.html)

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