



Occupational Outlook Handbook > Transportation and Material Moving >

PRINTER-FRIENDLY

Hand Laborers and Material Movers

Summary | What They Do | Work Environment | **How to Become One** | Pay | Job Outlook | State & Area Data | Similar Occupations | More Info

Summary

Summary

Quick Facts: Hand Laborers and Material Movers	
2019 Median Pay	\$28,710 per year \$13.80 per hour
Typical Entry-Level Education	No formal educational credential
Work Experience in a Related Occupation	None
On-the-job Training	Short-term on-the-job training
Number of Jobs, 2018	4,234,900
Job Outlook, 2018-28	4% (As fast as average)
Employment Change, 2018-28	156,200



[What Hand Laborers and Material Movers Do](#)

Hand laborers and material movers manually move freight, stock, or other materials.

[Work Environment](#)

Most hand laborers and material movers work full time. Because materials are shipped around the clock, some workers, especially those in warehousing, work overnight shifts.

[How to Become a Hand Laborer or Material Mover](#)

There are usually no formal educational requirements for anyone to become a hand laborer or material mover. Employers typically require only that applicants be physically able to perform the work.

[Pay](#)

The median annual wage for hand laborers and material movers was \$28,710 in May 2019.

[Job Outlook](#)

Overall employment of hand laborers and material movers is projected to grow 4 percent from 2018 to 2028, about as fast as the average for all occupations. Job prospects should be good because of the need to replace workers who leave these occupations.

[State & Area Data](#)

Explore resources for employment and wages by state and area for hand laborers and material movers.

[Similar Occupations](#)

Compare the job duties, education, job growth, and pay of hand laborers and material movers with similar occupations.

[More Information, Including Links to O*NET](#)

Learn more about hand laborers and material movers by visiting additional resources, including O*NET, a source on key characteristics of workers and occupations.

What They Do

[What They Do ->](#)

What Hand Laborers and Material Movers Do

About this section

Hand laborers and material movers manually move freight, stock, or other materials. Some of these workers feed or remove material to or from machines, clean vehicles, pick up unwanted household goods, and pack materials for moving.

Duties

Hand laborers and material movers typically do the following:

- Manually move material from one place to another
- Pack or wrap products by hand
- Keep a record of the material they move
- Signal machine operators to help move material
- Clean cars, equipment, and workplaces

In warehouses and in wholesale and retail operations, hand laborers and material movers work closely with [material moving machine operators](#) and [material recording clerks](#). Some workers are employed in manufacturing industries, loading material onto conveyor belts or other machines.



Some vehicle and equipment cleaners wash cars.

The following are examples of types of hand laborers and material movers:

Cleaners of vehicles and equipment wash automobiles and other vehicles, as well as storage tanks, pipelines, and related machinery. They use cleaning products, vacuums, hoses, and brushes. Most of these workers clean cars at a carwash, an automobile dealership, or a rental agency. Some clean industrial equipment at manufacturing firms. Some—for example, those who work at a carwash, also known as carwash attendants—interact with customers.

Hand laborers and freight, stock, and material movers move materials to and from storage and production areas, loading docks, delivery trucks, ships, and containers. Although their specific duties may vary, most of these movers, often called *pickers*, work in warehouses. Some workers retrieve products from storage and move them to loading areas. Other workers load and unload cargo from a truck. When moving a package, pickers keep track of the package number, sometimes with a hand-held scanner, to ensure proper delivery. Sometimes they open containers and sort the material.

Hand packers and packagers package a variety of materials by hand. They may label cartons, inspect items for defects, and keep records of items packed. Some of these workers pack materials for shipment and move them to a loading dock. Hand packers in grocery stores, also known as grocery baggers, bag groceries for customers at checkout.

Machine feeders and offbearers process materials by feeding them into equipment or by removing them from equipment. The equipment is generally operated by other workers, such as material moving machine operators. Machine feeders and offbearers help the operator if the machine becomes jammed or needs minor repairs. Machine feeders also track the amount of material they process during a shift.

Refuse and recyclable material collectors gather garbage and recyclables from homes and businesses to transport to a dump, landfill, or recycling center. Many collectors lift garbage cans by hand and empty them into their truck. Some collectors drive the garbage or recycling truck along a scheduled route and may use a hydraulic lift to empty the contents of a dumpster into the truck.

[<- Summary](#)

[Work Environment ->](#)

Work Environment

Work Environment

About this section [?](#)

Hand laborers and material movers held about 4.2 million jobs in 2018. Employment in the detailed occupations that make up hand laborers and material movers was distributed as follows:

Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand	2,953,800
Packers and packagers, hand	673,400
Cleaners of vehicles and equipment	408,500
Refuse and recyclable material collectors	133,000
Machine feeders and offbearers	66,200

The largest employers of hand laborers and material movers were as follows:

Transportation and warehousing	23%
Administrative and support and waste management and remediation services	22
Manufacturing	13
Wholesale trade	13

Hand laborers and material movers lift and carry heavy objects, and their work is usually repetitive and physically demanding. They bend, kneel, crouch, or crawl in awkward positions.

Injuries and Illnesses

Hand laborers and freight, stock, and material movers and refuse and recyclable material collectors have some of the highest rates of injuries and illnesses of all occupations. Moving heavy objects around warehouses or onto trucks, or bending while cleaning a vehicle, may lead to sprains, strains, or overexertion.

Work Schedules

Most hand laborers and freight, stock, and material movers work full time.

Shifts longer than 8 hours are common, and sometimes overtime is available. Because materials are shipped around the clock, some workers, especially those in warehousing, work overnight shifts.

[<- What They Do](#)

[How to Become One ->](#)

How to Become One

How to Become a Hand Laborer or Material Mover

About this section [?](#)

There are usually no formal educational requirements for anyone to become a hand laborer or material mover. Employers typically require only that applicants be physically able to perform the work.

Education

There are no formal educational requirements for anyone to become a hand laborer or material mover.

Training

Most positions for hand laborers and material movers require less than 1 month of on-the-job training. Some workers need only a few days of training, and most training is done by a supervisor or a more experienced worker who decides when trainees are ready to work on their own.

Workers learn safety rules as part of their training. Many of these rules are standardized through the [Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#) [®](#) (OSHA).

Licenses, Certifications, and Registrations



Refuse and recyclable material collectors lift heavy garbage containers.



Refuse and recyclable material collectors who drive trucks that exceed a certain capacity—such as vehicles with the combined weight of the vehicle, passengers, and cargo exceeding 26,000 pounds—must have a commercial driver's license (CDL). Obtaining a CDL requires passing written, skill, and vision tests.

Hand laborers and material movers learn on the job.

Important Qualities

Customer-service skills. Hand laborers and material movers who work with the public, such as grocery baggers or carwash attendants, must be pleasant and courteous to customers.

Hand-eye coordination. Most hand laborers and material movers use their arms and hands to manipulate objects or move objects into specific positions.

Listening skills. Hand laborers and material movers follow instructions that a supervisor gives them.

Physical stamina. Hand laborers and material movers need the endurance to perform strenuous tasks, such as moving or cleaning objects, throughout the day.

Physical strength. Some hand laborers and material movers must be able to lift and carry heavy objects.

[<- Work Environment](#)

[Pay ->](#)

Pay

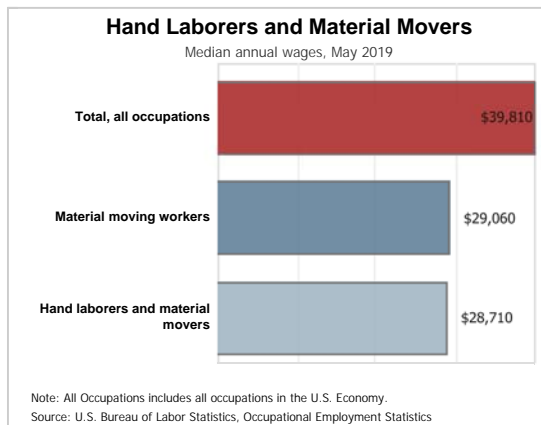
About this section [?](#)

Pay

The median annual wage for hand laborers and material movers was \$28,710 in May 2019. The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$20,800, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$46,050.

Median annual wages for hand laborers and material movers in May 2019 were as follows:

Refuse and recyclable material collectors	\$37,840
Machine feeders and offbearers	31,180
Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand	29,510
Packers and packagers, hand	25,910
Cleaners of vehicles and equipment	25,800



In May 2019, the median annual wages for hand laborers and material movers in the top industries in which they worked were as follows:

Wholesale trade	\$31,060
Manufacturing	30,610
Transportation and warehousing	30,300
Administrative and support and waste management and remediation services	26,480

Some hand laborers and material movers, such as grocery baggers or carwash attendants, may receive tips.

Most hand laborers and freight, stock, and material movers work full time.

Shifts longer than 8 hours are common, and sometimes overtime is available. Because materials are shipped around the clock, some workers, especially those in warehousing, work overnight shifts.

[<- How to Become One](#)

[Job Outlook ->](#)

Job Outlook

About this section [?](#)

Job Outlook

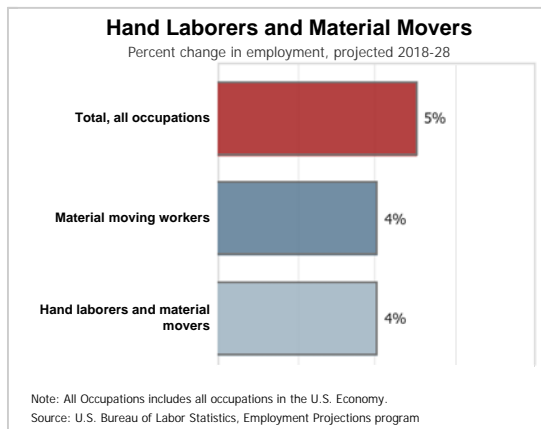
Overall employment of hand laborers and material movers is projected to grow 4 percent from 2018 to 2028, about as fast as the average for all occupations. Projected employment changes will vary by occupation.

Employment of hand laborers and freight, stock, and material movers—about two-thirds of all the workers in this profile—is projected to grow 5 percent from 2018 to 2028, about as fast as the average for all occupations. Although some warehouses are installing equipment such as high-speed conveyors and sorting systems to increase efficiency, these workers will still be needed to move materials in nearly all sectors of the economy.

Employment of hand packers and packagers is projected to decline 3 percent from 2018 to 2028. Grocery stores, which employ many hand packers and packagers, may employ fewer baggers as a growing number of stores have self-checkouts where customers or existing [cashiers](#) bag groceries themselves. Automation is becoming more viable in warehouses and, if it expands, will reduce the need for workers there.

Employment of refuse and recyclable material collectors is projected to grow 8 percent from 2018 to 2028, faster than the average for all occupations. Trash collection activity should be expected to increase as the population grows, and collectors will be needed to remove trash.

Employment of cleaners of vehicles and equipment is projected to grow 6 percent from 2018 to 2028, about as fast as the average for all occupations. Demand for automotive repair and maintenance services, as well as a growing automobile dealers industry, is expected to contribute to employment growth of cleaners of vehicles and equipment.



Employment of machine feeders and offbearers is projected to show little or no change from 2018 to 2028. Many of these workers are employed in manufacturing industries, in which functions are being automated, so employment is expected to remain unchanged.

Job Prospects

Job prospects for hand laborers and material movers are expected to be good. The need to replace workers who leave these occupations should create a large number of job openings.

Employment projections data for hand laborers and material movers, 2018-28

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2018	Projected Employment, 2028	Change, 2018-28		Employment by Industry
				Percent	Numeric	
Hand laborers and material movers	—	4,234,900	4,391,200	4	156,200	—
Cleaners of vehicles and equipment	53-7061	408,500	433,000	6	24,600	Get data
Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand	53-7062	2,953,800	3,097,900	5	144,000	Get data
Machine feeders and offbearers	53-7063	66,200	66,300	0	100	Get data
Packers and packagers, hand	53-7064	673,400	650,000	-3	-23,400	Get data
Refuse and recyclable material collectors	53-7081	133,000	143,900	8	10,900	Get data

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

[<- Pay](#)

[State & Area Data ->](#)

State & Area Data

State & Area Data

About this section [?](#)

Occupational Employment Statistics (OES)

The [Occupational Employment Statistics](#) (OES) program produces employment and wage estimates annually for over 800 occupations. These estimates are available for the nation as a whole, for individual states, and for metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas. The link(s) below go to OES data maps for employment and wages by state and area.

- [Cleaners of vehicles and equipment](#)
- [Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand](#)
- [Machine feeders and offbearers](#)
- [Packers and packagers, hand](#)
- [Refuse and recyclable material collectors](#)

Projections Central

Occupational employment projections are developed for all states by Labor Market Information (LMI) or individual state Employment Projections offices. All state projections data are available at www.projectionscentral.com. Information on this site allows projected employment growth for an occupation to be compared among states or to be compared within one state. In addition, states may produce projections for areas; there are links to each state's websites where these data may be retrieved.

CareerOneStop

CareerOneStop includes hundreds of [occupational profiles](#) with data available by state and metro area. There are links in the left-hand side menu to compare occupational employment by state and occupational wages by local area or metro area. There is also a [salary info tool](#) to search for wages by zip code.

[<- Job Outlook](#)







[Similar Occupations ->](#)

Similar Occupations

Similar Occupations

About this section [?](#)

This table shows a list of occupations with job duties that are similar to those of hand laborers and material movers.


	OCCUPATION	JOB DUTIES	ENTRY-LEVEL EDUCATION	2019 MEDIAN PAY
	Construction Laborers and Helpers	Construction laborers and helpers perform many tasks that require physical labor on construction sites.	See How to Become One	\$36,000
	Delivery Truck Drivers and Driver/Sales Workers	Delivery truck drivers and driver/sales workers pick up, transport, and drop off packages and small shipments within a local region or urban area.	High school diploma or equivalent	\$32,020
	Heavy and Tractor-trailer Truck Drivers	Heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers transport goods from one location to another.	Postsecondary nondegree award	\$45,260
	Material Moving Machine Operators	Material moving machine operators use machinery to transport various objects.	See How to Become One	\$36,770
	Material Recording Clerks	Material recording clerks track product information in order to keep businesses and supply chains on schedule.	High school diploma or equivalent	\$30,010
	Water Transportation Workers	Water transportation workers operate and maintain vessels that take cargo and people over water.	See How to Become One	\$57,330

[<- State & Area Data](#)

[More Info ->](#)

More Info

Contacts for More Information

About this section 

For more information about hand laborers and material movers, visit

[MHI](#) 

[Warehousing Education and Research Council](#) 


O*NET

[Cleaners of Vehicles and Equipment](#) 

[Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand](#) 

[Machine Feeders and Offbearers](#) 

[Packers and Packagers, Hand](#) 

[Refuse and Recyclable Material Collectors](#) 

[<- Similar Occupations](#)

SUGGESTED CITATION:

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Hand Laborers and Material Movers, on the Internet at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/transportation-and-material-moving/hand-laborers-and-material-movers.htm> (visited August 09, 2020).

Last Modified Date: Friday, April 10, 2020

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