



INDUSTRY OVERVIEW

Building the Capital Area's Construction Workforce

The information below will give career seekers an overview of the industry and provide guidance on what type of construction career they may be interested in.

THREE SECTORS:

The construction industry can be broken down into three main sectors: Heavy, Commercial and Residential.

- Heavy Construction:** Builds roads, bridges, dams, underground utilities, large infrastructure projects, etc.
- Commercial Construction:** Builds factories, stadiums, hospitals, schools, office buildings, stores, restaurants, etc.
- Residential Construction:** Builds apartment buildings, condominiums and houses.

All three of these sectors include the construction of new buildings or the renovation of existing buildings as a specialized sub-sector.

Each sector can be further broken down into what are known as the 'skilled trades.'

Skilled trades personnel have a particular set of skills in the areas of concrete, masonry, steel or wood framing, heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC), plumbing, electrical, roofing, painting, finish carpentry, etc. These individuals who are or work for what are known as 'trades contractors' do the actual construction.

Construction companies and trades contractors tend to specialize in projects within one of these three sectors.

Education and training should be focused on the trade and sector you wish to work in.

HANDS OFF vs. HANDS ON

Many people do not realize that by the time they see a building being built a great deal of work has already been completed.

This 'hands off' work, or activities other than the actual construction, has been done by real estate professionals, loan officers, designers, architects, estimators, plan reviewers, zoning personnel, drain commissioner staff and schedulers as well as a host of other preconstruction activity completed by construction management firms or general contractors to develop, design and plan a project.

This hands off activity continues during construction by project managers, superintendents, engineers and inspectors who oversee the actual construction and verify the project is being built according to the plans.

The ‘hands on’ work, or the actual construction activities, is completed by the skilled trades workers previously described.

Without the efforts of those doing the hands off activities of oversight, design and management, the hands on personnel will not be given the specifications and expectations for a particular project.

Both types of construction workers must work hand in hand to see that each and every construction project is successfully completed.

Knowing what type of work appeals to you is important as you explore the world of construction.

UNION vs. NON-UNION

No description about the construction industry would be complete without mention of the differences between union and non-union skilled trades construction workers.

The union construction workforce has been organized into nineteen different skilled trades. Each of these skilled trades unions has its own registered apprenticeship program providing the necessary training to be successful as a union skilled trades worker. Each union has negotiated its own collective bargaining agreement which states worker pay and benefits. Signatory contractors are those construction companies that actually employ union workers and must abide by the terms of the bargaining agreement.

Non-union workers work as independent contractors or for what are known as ‘open shop’ or ‘merit shop’ companies. There are no collective bargaining agreements. Worker pay, benefits and training is up to the individual employing company. Some non-union construction companies have registered apprenticeship programs and refer to their workers as skilled craft workers.

Union skilled trades workers tend to work only on Heavy and Commercial projects. There are very few union workers in the Residential Sector here in Michigan. Non-union workers work in all three sectors.

Deciding to work as a union or non-union worker is a major consideration when looking into a career in construction.