

Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info



Pursuing Your Green Job Dreams

Dear EcoGirl: I want to get a green job, so that my work can help nurture the planet's well-being. Where do I start?
Signed, Job Seeker

Dear Job Seeker: Thank you for your question. Yes, greening our work activities is a vital way for us to be part of the solution. So, it's wonderful to see eco-jobs being increasingly discussed in books, magazines, websites, courses, and conferences.

Even President Obama's proposed economic stimulus plan includes provisions for creating green jobs, and encouraging a clean-energy economy, by investing in renewable energy, efficiency, public transit, and the like.

This combination of ecological, economic, and employment objectives has been championed for years by grassroots activists, such as the Apollo Alliance (www.apolloalliance.org) and Van Jones, president of Green for All and author of *The Green Collar Economy*.

Through this approach, we can address multiple problems at once — reducing fossil fuel use (thus trimming greenhouse gasses and health-harming pollutants); generating good jobs (hence lowering poverty rates and encouraging economic equity); and even saving money.

However, to achieve these outcomes, we need to pay attention to the details. For instance, with so many folks wanting to seem ecological, it's vital that we ensure that truly earth-friendly approaches are prioritized and funded. To further explore the definitions, claims, and realities of green jobs, check out the articles at (www.alternet.org/environment/123819) and (www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2008/11/the-truth-about-green-jobs.html).

Steps to Success

So how can a job-seeker skillfully align with this trend?

1) Make a realistic plan. Paid jobs in this arena are still just emerging, so

this isn't necessarily a quick way to make money. You're more likely to succeed if you connect to your passion, plan for the long-term, and develop your ability to produce tangible results.

2) Refine your understanding of green, recognizing that it's a spectrum not an absolute. Despite our common casual language, jobs aren't really dividable into green and non-green ones, but rather come in varying shades.

My first criteria in assessing any activity's green level is: How quickly and meaningfully does it help us shift from a negative to a positive relationship with the planet's vital systems? With time so short and the tasks so large, it's vital that we emphasize actions with the most impact.

Viewed from this perspective, earth-nurturing jobs can include not only those making essential new eco-products, but also those repairing old items, selling used ones, implementing energy efficiencies, and more. Especially look for activities that reduce fossil fuel use, resource extraction, habitat destruction, pollution, and waste.

3) Green the job you have. Explore ways to better align your company's offerings and actions with the planet's needs, thus reducing your organization's eco-footprint and positioning it well for the future. Green's current popularity can improve your proposal's chances. Also, trim company expenses in ways that are eco-friendly (such as buying select quality products), not earth-harmful (such as purchasing cheap throwaway items). Encourage your field's industry groups to support governmental ecological targets, recognizing that everyone's survival depends on a functioning planet. Also, green your personal job activities, for instance by carpooling, biking, or taking public transit to work.

4) Look for green job options that fit you. If you're seeking a new eco-job,

don't limit yourself to the "green collar" jobs being primarily suggested for blue collar workers. Not everyone would make a great solar installer. Instead, consider the skills you want to offer and the causes and organizations you'd like to serve. Even green companies need accountants and salespeople!

5) Continue developing yourself. Educate yourself about sustainability, to understand the remedies that will really make a difference. Cultivate the skills you'll need for the roles you want to play. Connect with earth-friendly allies and organizations, to stay informed about this trend as it evolves. Consider volunteering, to gain both experience and credentials.

There are many resources to help you on your chosen path. Here are three to get you started.

- The Feb. 28 Santa Rosa gathering, "Good Jobs, Green Jobs National Conference Report Back Panel Presentation," will feature representatives of the Youth Green Jobs Sonoma program (<http://upcoming.yahoo.com/event/1746008,236-7335>).
- Hopland's Solar Living Institute (www.solarliving.org, 744-2017) offers classes on sustainable living.
- I've created a webpage with links to green jobs (www.healthyworld.org/jobs.html).

Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of The Organic Guides, and Editor and Lead Writer for The Next STEP newsletter. Email your questions about going green to <EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info> for possible inclusion in future columns. View past columns at <www.AskEcoGirl.info>. Also contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical. "EcoGirl: Encouraging the eco-hero in everyone."

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