

AIRCRAFT MECHANICS AND SERVICE TECHNICIANS

OCCUPATION DESCRIPTION

Diagnose, adjust, repair, or overhaul aircraft engines and assemblies, such as hydraulic and pneumatic systems. Include helicopter and aircraft engine specialists. To keep aircraft in peak operating condition, aircraft and avionics equipment mechanics and service technicians perform scheduled maintenance, make repairs, and complete inspections required by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Because they may work on the tops of wings and fuselages on large jet planes, aircraft mechanics must not be afraid of heights. Mechanics usually work in hangars or in other indoor areas. When hangars are full or when repairs must be made quickly, they can work outdoors, sometimes in unpleasant weather. Mechanics often work under time pressure to maintain flight schedules or, in general aviation, to keep from inconveniencing customers. At the same time, mechanics have a tremendous responsibility to maintain safety standards, and this can cause the job to be stressful.

Frequently, mechanics must lift or pull objects weighing more than 70 pounds. They often stand, lie, or kneel in awkward positions and occasionally must work in precarious positions, such as on scaffolds or ladders. Noise and vibration are common when engines are being tested, so ear protection is necessary. Aircraft mechanics usually work 40 hours a week on 8-hour shifts around the clock. Overtime work is frequent.

METHOD OF ENTRY

Occupations at this level generally require completion of vocational school training. Some programs last only a few weeks while others may last more than a year. In some occupations, a license is needed that requires passing an examination after completion of the training.

TRAINING

Most mechanics who work on civilian aircraft are certified by the FAA as an "airframe mechanic" or a "power plant mechanic." Mechanics who also have an inspector's authorization can certify work completed by other mechanics and perform required inspections. Uncertified mechanics are supervised by those with certificates. Although a few people become mechanics through on-the-job training, most learn their job in 1 of about 170 trade schools certified by the FAA.

RESTRICTIONS ON LICENSING AND CERTIFICATION

No felony convictions for the last 10 years; no assault or crimes involving children. Must have strong reading and math skills; minimum 10th grade in reading and math.

EMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK

Average Hourly Wage 2007: \$19.15; Average Openings per year: 60