



Profiles	Health and safety
Name	Anne Willcox
Age	54
Job	University health and safety adviser

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Career path and qualifications so far

After studying Maths, Physics, Chemistry and General Studies at A Level, I completed my first degree in Chemistry at the University of Wales, Bangor and then went on to study for an MSc in Analytical Chemistry at Loughborough University. After graduation I spent a year in industry before returning to Loughborough to do a PhD. I then spent two years in postdoctoral research at Cardiff. After a very brief spell working for the Civil Service, I successfully applied for my current job. Although I am nominally still in the same post, the department in which I work has grown considerably over the 25 years I've been there.

What is a health and safety adviser?

A Health and Safety Adviser works to ensure a commitment to safety is maintained by all departments in their organisation. This involves complying with all aspects of health and safety legislation. A health and safety adviser's work incorporates assessments of people, workplaces and procedures, as well as training other staff.

Day to day activities

Although my job title indicates health and safety in the university, my job has very little to do with university buildings. My expertise lies in the areas of CoSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health) systems, control and disposal of toxic waste and general chemical safety advice. I also provide a significant amount of safety training, and I process accident and incident reports for the university. I get involved in a broad spectrum of activities. I am on 24 hour call for general emergencies (including fires) and have to be prepared to respond to any safety problem, no matter how bizarre.

Further qualifications

When I joined the department, I attended a few short courses in general safety but I acquired most of my training and development on the job. Nowadays more formal qualifications are often required. There are opportunities to study for an MSc in a safety related subject or the NEBOSH (National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health) certificate and diploma. To keep up with legislation it is necessary to attend specialist courses on a regular basis.

Why health and safety?

One of the main attractions of health and safety is that it enables me to use my chemistry training alongside other interests such as first aid. As well as this, the nature of the work means that I'm constantly adapting to working with different people in different environments. There are so many developments in safety issues and regulations that even after a number of years in the same job my day to day work remains diverse and interesting.

What do you most enjoy about your job?

If you had asked me 20 years ago, I would have said 'being able to do things like crawling down tunnels and climbing on roofs'. These days, that is less important and I get the biggest kick from working with people to achieve the necessary legal standards and accepted good practices. The job has tremendous variety; I can find myself working in a training situation, inspecting a laboratory, advising on machinery guarding, attending a fire and more besides – all in one day.

What other skills do you need?

My job requires me to be able to work and communicate with a wide range of people. Good written skills are essential when writing reports, letters and procedures to be followed by departments. Tact, the ability to convince and persuade, to encourage and, where necessary, to be firmly authoritative are all necessary skills. I also need to be competent with handling large amounts of information and data as well as maintaining basic computer skills. My job does not involve fixed hours and I need to be able to function effectively in an emergency, even in the early hours of the morning having had very little sleep.

Is a science degree essential?

It depends on your chosen field of employment. For some organisations, good A Levels and an appropriate safety diploma may be sufficient. However, if you want to work in a university environment or in many large organisations, a science degree (and Chemistry is one of the best) is virtually essential. Experience is also important and progression depends on appropriate experience and training.

Further information/contacts

The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health, The Grange, Highfield Drive, Wigston, Leicestershire LE18 1NN
Tel: 0116 257 3100 Fax: 0116 257 3101
www.iosh.co.uk

For further information on careers in the chemical sciences contact:

Education Department, Royal Society of Chemistry, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1J 0BA
Tel: 020 7440 3344 Email: education@rsc.org
www.rsc.org/studentzone www.rsc.org/chemsoc
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