



Homeland defense opens more doors

By Tranette Ledford

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As national policies for homeland security evolve, the job market is changing the options for civilian careers related to homeland defense — and opening up opportunities not limited to traditional law enforcement fields.

Corporations, government agencies and small businesses are operating within a climate of heightened security-consciousness — meaning your military background lends itself to better-than-ever job prospects.

Evan Lesser helps transitioning service members move into new jobs, particularly in security-related positions. His company, Clearancejobs.com, has built a database of job seekers — and 70 percent have military experience.

Before launching his company in 2002, Lesser worked in a variety of positions with the Defense Department and defense industry contractors. He's an expert in supply and demand in the homeland defense job market. He knows firsthand the value of military service and how it translates among civilian hiring managers.

Q The homeland security and defense industry has changed dramatically since 2001. What are the current job demands and emerging fields?

A The range of open positions includes information technology, engineering, aerospace and intelligence analysis. Other careers are transportation security, border patrol, scientific services, emergency management and language experts.

There are careers in areas not immediately associated with homeland security and defense — support or business roles that keep an organization running, such as contract negotiators, document editors, administrative assistants, multimedia technicians, financial analysts and accounting positions.

Imagine this scenario: a private employer is selected by the government to develop sensors to signal incidents involving chemical agents in the air. First, the office building has to be set up. There will be builders constructing the space, network architects planning the IT infrastructure, and telecom specialists running cable and patching phone systems. When the office is ready, there might be scientists conducting research, a help desk to deal with computer issues, and financial analysts making sure the project stays on budget. There will be managers at every level, experienced government liaisons, and armed guards protecting the building, providing access control and implementing security policies. This example shows the range of jobs required for a single homeland security product or service to be completed.

Q What are the most sought-after skills or positions for homeland security and defense jobs for 2006?

A Candidates skilled in network security continue to be in high demand, as they are responsible for ensuring a computer network is safe from hackers and unauthorized users. Network security may entail setting up firewalls and antivirus software, detecting network intruders and establishing virtual private networks. Certification is an added bonus and can significantly boost a salary.

Workers with experience in emergency management, disaster preparedness and chemical or biological incident response also will be in high demand this year.

Database administrators will have their pick of jobs in 2006. They're also among some of the highest paid candidates found on ClearanceJobs.com.

The government also needs translators. Anyone who can speak, write and read in foreign languages and dialects can make around \$75,000 — up to \$150,000 overseas and in danger zones.

Engineering jobs related to homeland security will be prevalent. This would include electrical, aerospace, mechanical and computer science engineers.

Q How important is having a security clearance in this field?

A An active security clearance has intrinsic value, but does not alone guarantee you a job. Learned skills, on-the-job experience, certifications in your profession and a sharp résumé are often what pushes a candidate to the front of the hiring line.

Having an active security clearance means a higher salary for jobs in homeland security and defense. In a ClearanceJobs.com salary survey, jobs with security clearances earned an average of 23 percent more than their uncleared equivalent counterparts outside the defense industry.

Q Transitioning service members worked hard to develop their skill sets. Are these skills in demand in the homeland security and defense job market?

A Absolutely. Some skills translate directly. For example, if you worked logistics in the military you can do the same in private industry. If you ran military computer networks in the service, the same job is available after you transition. Those with years of experience in the service are in demand as military subject matter experts. Men and women who were leaders or officers in the military turn out to be engaging and successful corporate trainers. All of these roles can be found in support of homeland security.

Career Transition Experts is a monthly feature. Tell us what you think in an e-mail to Tledford@atpco.com.

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