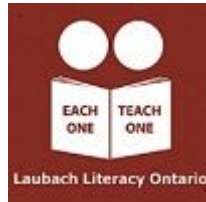


Apprenticeship and Skilled Trades Series

Ken the Heavy Equipment Operator



by Robyn Cook-Ritchie



Published by Laubach Literacy
Ontario

<https://www.laubach-on.ca/>

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Canada



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This Employment Ontario project is funded in part by the Government of Canada
and the Government of Ontario.

Ken the Heavy Equipment Operator

by Robyn Cook-Ritchie

Ken is a heavy equipment operator. He has been an operator for more than 30 years.

Heavy equipment is the term used to describe the large machines that are used in construction, forestry, agriculture, and mining. Ken is a heavy equipment operator in the construction industry.



Heavy equipment operators may run many different types of equipment. Some of the most common types of heavy equipment are:

- Excavators
- Bulldozers
- Backhoes
- Graders
- Telehandlers
- Dump trucks
- Compactors
- Skid steers



An excavator is used to dig foundations, trenches, and large holes. It has an upper part, called the "house," that sits on top of an undercarriage with tracks or wheels. The house has a cab for the operator and a boom that extends out from the front of the machine. There is a bucket attached to the end of the boom. The bucket is used to scoop up soil, sand, and other materials. The bucket can be replaced with other attachments, such as a hydraulic hammer.



A bulldozer is a machine used to move earth, rock, and other materials. It has a blade that can be angled to move materials in different directions. The bulldozer also has a ripper to break up hard ground. The operator sits in a cab and controls the machine by using levers and pedals.



[Image source](#)

A backhoe has a digging bucket attached to a hydraulic arm and mounted on a tractor. It is used for excavation, grading, and digging in construction and agriculture. Operators use backhoes to dig smaller holes and to lift and move heavy objects.



[Image source](#)

A grader is used to create a smooth and level surface. It has a long blade that is mounted on a chassis with tracks or wheels. The blade can be adjusted to different angles and heights to grade the surface of the ground. The operator sits in a cab above the blade and controls the grader by using levers and pedals. Graders are used to level and smooth soil, gravel, and other materials on construction sites. They are also used to maintain and repair roads and highways.



[Image source](#)

A telehandler, also called a telescopic handler, is used to move heavy material or equipment. It has a telescopic boom arm mounted on a wheeled platform. It can be used to lift, carry, and place heavy loads in hard-to-reach places. The telehandler can have many different attachments, including forks, buckets, and platforms, to perform different tasks.



[Image source](#)

A dump truck is a vehicle used to transport loose material in construction and mining. It has a hinged bed that can be raised to discharge its contents and is mounted on a truck with wheels. The bed is raised using hydraulic cylinders and material is dumped by gravity. Dump trucks come in different sizes.



[Image source](#)

A compactor is used to make waste, soil, and other substances smaller and denser. This makes them easier to transport and dispose of. There are different types of compactors, such as plate, landfill, and roller compactors.

- Plate compactors are used to compact dirt.
- Landfill compactors are used to compact waste in landfills.
- Roller compactors are used in road construction and paving.



[Image source](#)

A skid steer is a smaller machine that can be used for a variety of tasks. Skid steers typically include a bucket as the default attachment. You can also add many different attachments, allowing skid steers to assist with all sorts of construction and landscaping projects.

The skid steer gets its name from the way it turns. The angle of the wheels or tracks are fixed, so they will only point straight ahead. You steer by speeding up either the left or right side of the vehicle. This causes the wheels to drag — or skid — across the ground as the skid steer turns.



Heavy equipment operators may also do routine maintenance on their machinery. They might check fluid levels, inspect belts and hoses, and make minor repairs. They also keep track of their equipment and make sure it is being used safely and efficiently.



[Image source](#)

If you want to become a heavy equipment operator, there are courses you can take to get a certificate. Many people take these courses if they don't have any experience using heavy equipment. Some employers want you to have a high school diploma or equivalent. Some people also learn on the job. Ken learned on the job.



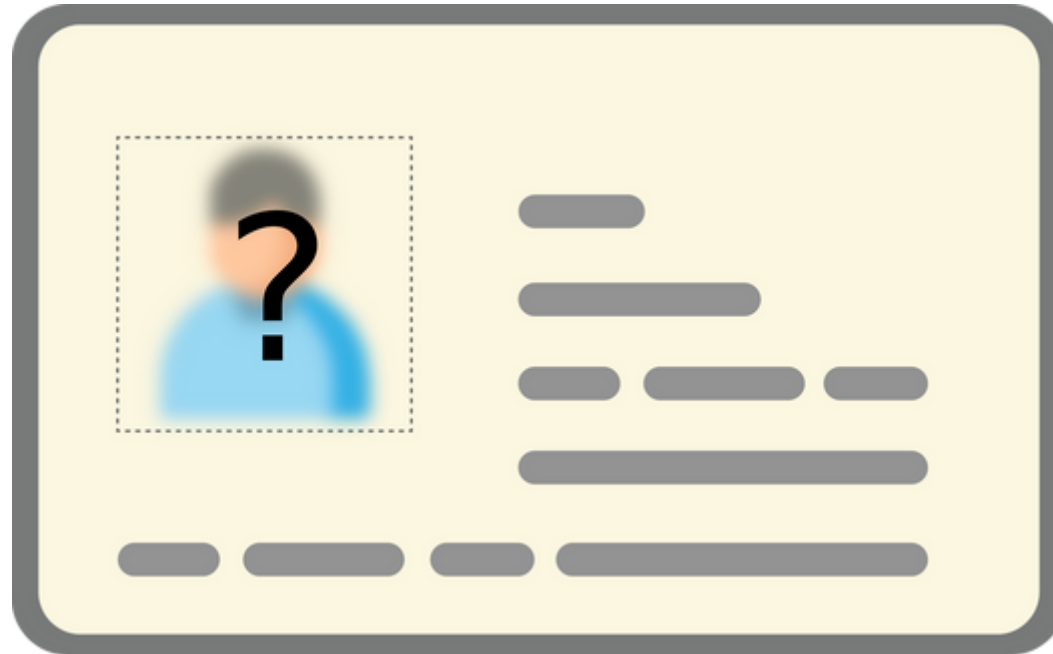
[Image source](#)

Operators in large cities usually make more money. However, they often work only on one type of machine doing the same thing. Operators in smaller communities usually do a wide variety of work and often run different machines. They typically make less money. Ken has worked in a large city and in a rural community.



[Image source](#)

Ken started his career by getting his Class D license. This allowed him to drive a dump truck. A small construction company hired him even though he didn't have any experience. They hired him because he had his DZ license, and because he showed up for his interview on time and prepared.



[Image](#)
[source](#)

When Ken first started, he worked as a general labourer and helper. He started by doing digging that needed to be done by hand. He cleaned up job sites. He also helped the operators by measuring sites and estimating grades. Sometimes he ran a small packing machine. He asked a lot of questions. He also learned by watching what the other operators were doing.



[Image source](#)

Once his employer got to know him, Ken would start the machines up and help do some of the simple maintenance. As Ken built trust with his employer he started to move the machines around the job sites to learn how to run them. As time went on, he started doing some of the smaller jobs to build his skills.



[Image source](#)

When Ken first started, most companies shut down during the winter. One winter, Ken decided to take a training program that was offered through Employment Insurance. He took a heavy equipment operator course even though he was already working as a heavy equipment operator. This helped him become more attractive to employers.



[Image source](#)

During another winter layoff, Ken got his Class A tractor trailer license so he could drive a float truck. A float truck is used to move heavy equipment to the job sites. It has a bed that can be raised or lowered with a hydraulic system. A float truck usually has a large trailer attached for added stability and load capacity. Float trucks are used in construction, transportation, and marine industries to move large items from one place to another.



Today, Ken is the main operator at the company he works for. He runs the biggest and most expensive machines to complete the most complicated jobs. Most of the time he runs a 32-ton excavator. He does very specialized work on the most difficult job sites.



Ken says some of the most challenging parts of the job are:

- Dealing with job site issues like groundwater that causes cave-ins
- Machine breakdowns
- Bad weather conditions
- Poor planning or mistakes in blueprints that mean you have to redo work
- Unrealistic expectations from customers



Ken says that some of the things that make the job satisfying are:

- Doing a job from start to finish
- Working independently on job sites
- Coming up with creative solutions on challenging job sites
- Building his skills so he is efficient and accurate
- Having customers ask for him to do their jobs because he has a great reputation

His favourite job was excavating his basement for his own house that he lives in now. He says he can admire his work every single day!

