

Amy Meinke

Title: Chemical Engineer
Company: Nebraska Public Power District – Cooper Nuclear Station.
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What attracted you to the company?

In a world of mega-mergers and cut-throat capitalism, it's refreshing to work for a company that takes a "by the people, for the people" approach to doing business. It just fits with the Nebraska way of life.

Please list some of your duties:

- Complete all training and certifications required for a nuclear power engineer.
- Provide engineering support on plant projects that affect the chemistry department.
- Reduce radiological dose to workers by identifying, removing and preventing minute dose-causing metal impurities from accumulating in the reactor coolant system.

What are the best/most interesting things about your job?

What I find most fascinating is that I get to see the information and theories I learned in college applied in the workplace. I am a very visual learner, so interfacing with real-life applications of processes I read about in school takes my understanding to a whole new level.

What is the most rewarding thing about your job?

It's rewarding to know that I play a tiny role in providing power to approximately one million Nebraskans.

How did you decide on this career path?

Growing up on a rural Nebraska farm definitely influenced my decision to become an engineer. Instead of having a few hundred TV stations, I had a few hundred books. Instead of playing video games, I built forts and took gadgets apart just to see how they worked. Then I had a great high school teacher that really got me interested in chemistry. So I just put the two together and decided to be a chemical engineer.

What kind of school, classes, and training most prepared you with the necessary skills?

I learned a lot at UNL, but it was definitely the two years of co-op and internship experience at two different NPPD plants and an ethanol plant that really allowed me to learn exactly what line of work within the chemical engineering field was most suitable for me.

Do you make a good living?

Yes, I make a great living. Very few people my age make what I do.

What kind of technology do you use and interact with?

I think that nuclear power generation is a great environmentally responsible technology. With the current resurgence of nuclear power, it's an exciting time to be entering the nuclear industry. Since joining NPPD, I've also implemented a few technologies to help improve plant performance at Cooper. I procured an X-Ray Fluorescence spectrometer (XRF) that is used to identify dose-causing metals in the reactor coolant system. I also introduced a new resin designed to enhance removal of the metal impurities from the system.

What advice would you give to students who are undecided on a career choice?

Pursue a career that intrigues you, yet also challenges your greatest strengths. The edge of your comfort zone may not be the easiest place to be, but the adrenaline rush will have you hooked for life. Also, enroll in a variety of university sponsored co-op and internship programs as a way to gain experience and to validate whether or not you've made a career choice that is suitable for the long term.