



Best East Coast Cities for Defense Jobs

By Tranette Ledford and ClearanceJobs.com

The 2009 Farmer’s Almanac predicts a colder than average winter in the east. But job forecasters are predicting the perfect storm. Retiring baby boomers, shifting political sands and an ever-present backlog of security clearance applications are clouding the horizon for hiring managers trying to fill the security-cleared worker shortage. That’s good news for transitioning military service members and civilians with existing clearance. Those with active clearances can fill these gaps — and one of the deepest pools of opportunity flows up and down the east coast.

The Big Picture

Metropolitan Washington, D.C. serves as the proverbial home base for defense jobs. But with the private sector, research labs, universities, and government contractors factored in, the playing field gets even bigger all the time. Opportunities extend throughout Northern Virginia’s suburbs and down about a three hour drive to the Hampton Roads area. Traditionally this region included Virginia Beach, Norfolk and Newport News. But current metropolitan statistics now embrace Suffolk, Chesapeake, Williamsburg, Portsmouth and six surrounding counties. North of the district in Maryland, opportunities flourish from Bethesda and Rockville up to Baltimore, Columbia and Ellicott City — all within an hour or so of the nation’s capital.

High Growth Defense Jobs

Location	Common Jobs
Metro Washington, DC	Information Technology, Program/Project Management, Systems Engineer
Southeast Virginia	Electronics Engineering, Shipbuilding, Information Technology
Maryland	Network Administrator, J2EE Developer, Software Engineer

Source: ClearanceJobs.com



Washington, D.C.

The U.S. federal government still reigns as the country's top employer. The sheer number of agencies physically housed in the district means a revolving door of vacancies requiring clearances, and this isn't likely to change any time soon. The Department of Labor estimates that 60 percent of the federal workforce will be eligible for retirement in the next ten years, leaving plenty of positions up for grabs and plenty requiring a clearance. Furthermore, many top Department of Defense programs will start the 2009 fiscal year with higher budgets. In total, a \$487.7 billion Defense Department budget has been set aside by lawmakers.

For military veterans, federal jobs offer the opportunity to continue to serve the public in a work environment that offers competitive pay, good benefits and structured promotion opportunities. It's also an increasingly satisfying place to work. A study of 283 federal organizations puts the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Government Accountability Office, Securities and Exchange Commission, NASA and the Department of Justice at the top of the list for satisfied employees.

The variance in agency missions is a wide one, with opportunities in every imaginable career field. Whatever backgrounds military service members bring to the table — whether its logistics, infantry or intelligence — the need for cleared workers is so critical, some agencies are putting people to work in unclassified areas while their clearances are pending. This puts the value of a security clearance at a premium. In some cases, it may hold more value than experience.

"Until the time to process new clearances falls below six months, employers may find candidates with fewer skills and the correct clearance as viable alternatives," said Evan Lesser, founder and director of ClearanceJobs.com, which matches security-cleared personnel with federal and defense industry hiring managers. "Naturally, it depends on the job in question. This wouldn't apply to highly skilled technical experts like engineers and software developers. But many careers such as service technicians, helpdesk staff, server administrators, archivists and data analysts can indeed be trained faster than it would take to obtain a clearance."

While jobs are plentiful and cultural and historic attractions abound in the district, the 2007 population count — some

Average Security-Cleared Salaries

Location	Salary
Metro Washington, DC	\$81,250
Southeast Virginia	\$72,627
Maryland	\$74,365

Source: ClearanceJobs.com

Top 20 Highest Salaries by Job Category

Job Category	Salary
IT Management-Executive	\$116,935
Database Admin-Oracle	\$101,905
IT Management-Project Manager	\$100,089
Project/Program Management	\$94,231
Systems Engineer	\$93,202
IT Software-Java/J2EE	\$93,036
Engineering-Aerospace and Aviation	\$92,923
Software Development	\$91,273
Network/LAN/WAN Design	\$84,545
Security-Network Management	\$83,309
Security-Intrusion Detection	\$83,158
IT Software-Prog	\$83,125
Engineering-Military Software	\$82,821
IT Hardware-Unix	\$82,708
Engineering-Military Hardware	\$80,625
Engineering-RF	\$80,500
Engineering-Electrical	\$80,392
Contract Admin	\$78,600
Engineering-Telecommunications	\$76,293
Linguist, Translator or Interpreter	\$70,952

Source: ClearanceJobs.com

588,000 residents — doubles Monday through Friday, boosted by employees who choose to live outside of the District. Regardless of whether you are a civilian or transitioning military service member, D.C. continues to welcome job-seeking security-cleared candidates with open arms.

Northern Virginia

The post 9/11 focus on security has impacted hiring trends all over this region. Employers are always looking for technical skills, but their interest extends to physical security, biomedical and financial sectors as well. The majority of companies hiring are those doing business with the federal government. Name a Virginia suburb and there's a cluster of government contractors in the vicinity. Arlington county alone houses more than 600 federal contractors. The U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics noted in late 2007 that Fairfax county, home to Fort Belvoir and hundreds of defense contractors, showed an average weekly wage of \$1,358, one of the highest in the country. The same report shows an even higher average weekly wage for Arlington county residents at \$1,458. Industry analysts predict this area will continue to be a magnet for defense industry job opportunities, regardless of the outcome of the November 2008 presidential election. As long as contractors have to compete for federal dollars, they'll keep facilities up and running in close proximity to their funding sources.

Another industry trend affecting the defense job market is the formation of corporate contracting partnerships. For example, numerous defense prime and sub-contractors will team up for the development of the Army's Future Combat Systems technologies. Boeing, SAIC, General Dynamics and BAE Systems are just a few that will work in conjunction with each other. This will open a wide range of opportunities in IT, engineering, management, assembly and other positions.

As for quality of life, culture and good schools are part of the package in Northern Virginia, while housing prices can be a challenge. That's changing a little, according to the Northern Virginia Association of Realtors. It reports that in July, 2008, sales prices were lower than last year by more than 12 percent. That still leaves the median sales price

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– Evan Lesser, Director, ClearanceJobs.com

at \$399,000, but there are communities with lower priced homes. A CNN/Money poll puts Reston and Burke in the top 100 list of best places to live.

Southeast Virginia

When it comes to security clearances and the job market, all roads lead to Hampton Roads — and extend outward like spokes along Virginia's southeast coast line. Cleared candidates looking for second careers may want to learn more about 'Pentagon South,' the new moniker for the growing hub of military installations and related businesses that continue to come in. The job market runs from Williamsburg through Hampton Roads down to Virginia Beach. All told, Southeast Virginia is seeing large growth of security clearance job opportunities.

“In June, the Small Business Administration ranked the Hampton Roads region number one for the highest percentage of high impact firms,” said Melissa Blankenship, marketing director, Defense and Homeland Security Consortium. “Next to D.C., we have the highest concentration of defense and homeland security jobs. Our ports provide a huge ship building business and they continually hire security-cleared personnel, from welders to maintenance to supervisors. We're bringing in 7,000 new jobs just for our distribution centers. As we continue to expand, we'll need more security-cleared workers.”

With several dozen military facilities in the region, cities like Suffolk are welcoming some major players. Lockheed Martin and General Dynamics both have operations due to Suffolk's strategic proximity to U.S. Joint Forces Command.

"The growth is non-stop," said Blankenship. "This is a great place to work and a great place to live. We've got everything from the opera to monster truck shows. It's also affordable."

With a whopping three quarters of the area's growth based on defense contracts, transitioning service members with an active clearance have tremendous job prospects.

"Southeast Virginia is arguably the ship building capital of the USA, so jobs in the area follow suit," said Lesser. "We see an ongoing need for systems engineers with naval backgrounds, welders, radar and IR techs and a host of IT jobs. There are requirements for security guards, training staff and plenty of contract administrators and proposal writers in Norfolk and the surrounding area." Looking for a region where defense and homeland security permeates daily life? Then Hampton Roads and the surrounding areas are ready for you.

Maryland

Maryland's state motto means 'strong deeds, gentle words.' It might be just as accurate to tack on 'great jobs.' Just across the Potomac from D.C., the state blends easily into the stable employment landscape, having reaped the benefits of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Act. While BRAC closed a number of military facilities and shifted jobs around, Maryland acquired an abundance of positions tailor-made for new veterans and cleared civilians. The state now expects 45,000 new jobs to move in by 2011, with a concentration in strategic programs and Defense Department positions. For starters, Fort Meade

will gain some 5,800 jobs, Bethesda's National Naval Medical Center will net 1,400, Andrews Air Force Base will gain 400 and Aberdeen Proving Ground another 9,000.

The map of Maryland's military and defense facilities tends to run together. Lockheed Martin and IntelSat General Corp operate in Bethesda, while BAE Systems and Booz Allen Hamilton are next door in Rockville. Baltimore houses Applied Defense Solutions and the Equinox Advanced Research Facility. Interested in working for smaller sub-contractors, thousands of companies make their home in Maryland, working directly for the government and partnering with the larger, more well-known primes.

One of the country's oldest settlements is now one of Maryland's newest job markets. Ellicott City and Columbia are ranked together as the eighth best place to live. But there are more than tea shops and bakeries lining the streets as Columbia has gone high tech. Northrop Grumman, Merkle, Biodefense Research Group and URS Corp. all operate here, contributing to a 20 percent boost to the median household income since 2000.

One point to note. According to the governor's office, the state's defense industry jobs are intelligence-heavy. That means employers keep a trained eye out for candidates with a military background, previous intel agency experience, and an active clearance.

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