

SPECIAL SERIES



BREAKING GROUND

A Spotlight on Six Women in Canada's Environmental Industry

LISA RICHARDSON

FROM THE TRADES TO TECHNICAL LEADERSHIP

Lisa's path shows how hands-on experience builds lasting impact.



Lisa Richardson didn't set out to build a career in the environmental industry. After high school, she sought traditional, hands-on work, exploring the culinary arts and other trades. But today, as a water treatment technician with [Milestone Environmental Contracting Inc.](#), Lisa is part of a growing movement of professionals who are helping reshape what it means to work in the environmental protection field — one clean waterway at a time.

Nonlinear Career Path

Lisa's first post-graduate job was with a company that built oil containment booms. It was a tough, toxic work environment, and Lisa soon felt exhausted and overworked. It was not the right fit, and she decided it was time for a change. She overheard coworkers discussing work in the water treatment department and decided to pursue the opportunity.

Today, seven years later, Lisa works confidently as a water

treatment technician, cleaning and protecting waterways across British Columbia and beyond. Her broad industry experience has given her a deep understanding of the tools, equipment, and techniques needed to treat a variety of pollutants in clients' water streams. Whether she's monitoring filtration systems or handling complex cleanup operations,

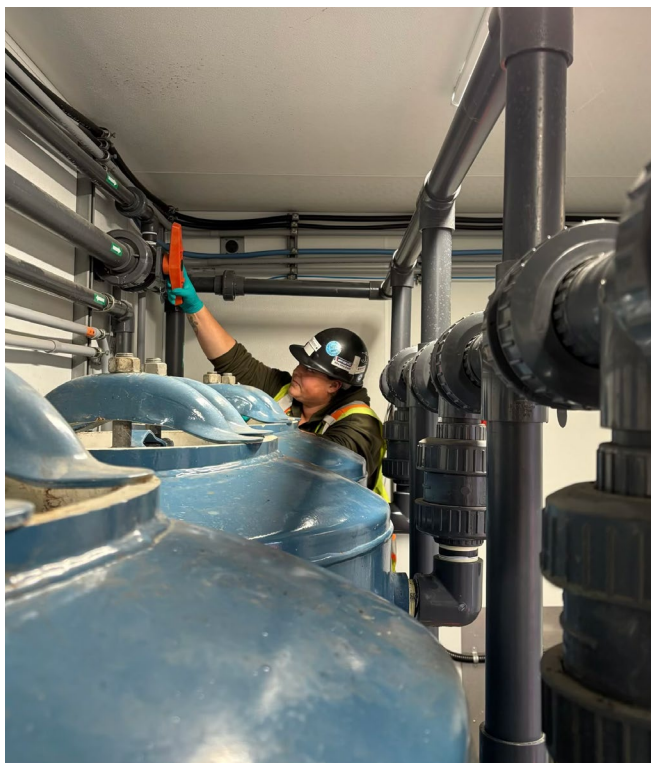
Lisa takes pride in knowing that her work directly contributes to cleaner, safer water environments.

That brave openness to possibility, to learning, and to change has defined Lisa's career ever since. Despite having no technical background, she dove into this role with the help of Milestone's on-the-job training programs and her own determination to master new skills.

Resilience and Reinvention

Every career has moments of uncertainty, and Lisa's journey is no exception. Transitioning into a new industry, navigating

a physically demanding job, and entering a male-dominated field all required courage and adaptability. But each challenge helped her build resilience.



“It is important to figure out what you want to do and who you are – what you like and dislike and try to find roles that intrigue, are gratifying and that you can be good at.”

When Lisa entered the water treatment industry, she knew she had to prove herself. Lifting heavy equipment, working outdoors, and standing on her feet for hours each day are all challenges she thrives on. Troubleshooting is another important aspect of the job. When something breaks down, she works with her team and draws on past experience to find a solution. She also credits her teammates and supervisor for keeping her motivated, as they are a great group to work with.

Lisa's approach to adversity is rooted in learning and self-reflection. When something doesn't go as planned, she looks for the lesson. She uses that knowledge to adjust and

move forward. This mindset has also helped her handle the social challenges that come with working in a male-dominated industry. Early in her career, Lisa encountered skepticism from older male colleagues who weren't used to seeing women in her role. Instead of taking offense, she faced it head-on. She learned that respect is crucial and earned, and that she should confront disrespectful behaviour directly. But she also learned she can't take everything personally.

She notes, however, that things are changing. New regulations and workplace standards have improved working conditions and mitigated challenging circumstances. Younger men today are also much more open and comfortable working with women. Milestone Environmental has many policies in place to keep the workplace non-biased and moving forward with the changes in the construction industry.

Leadership, Technical Excellence, and Curiosity

Lisa advises other women entering the field not to be afraid to try something new. Ideally, they'll wear a few different hats to keep learning and advancing their skills.

She hopes to set an example by expanding her own qualifications. She plans to enroll in the Environmental Operators Certification Program (EOCP), a six-month online course paired with 1,800 hours of credited work experience. With Milestone's support, she's eager to earn certification that would allow her to work anywhere in British Columbia.

Evolving Industry Identity

Lisa's career mirrors the evolution of the environmental industry itself. When she started, much of the focus was on compliance — meeting regulations and keeping projects within required limits. Today, the field has shifted toward innovation, sustainability, and proactive solutions. Lisa prides herself on collaborative problem-solving and finding practical, workable ideas with her teams and making them actionable.

“Don't be afraid of trying something new. Do your research and find the right education that will assist you in a role you desire. Don't be afraid to wear a few hats, take initiative, and keep learning and advancing your skills and knowledge.”

Looking back, Lisa says if she could start over, she'd invest more in education early on — but she doesn't regret her nonlinear path. Her advice to others is to be curious, adaptable, and not afraid to try something new.

Lisa's journey shows what's possible. Her story reflects one of the great truths of the environmental industry: there's no single path. It also embodies the evolution of an industry and the spirit of those who keep it moving forward: learning from challenges, leading through collaboration, and making a real difference. 

Special thanks to [Milestone Environmental Contracting Inc.](#)



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