

SPECIAL SERIES



BREAKING GROUND

A Spotlight on Six Women in Canada's Environmental Industry

PAULA HUTCHISON

TRANSLATING TECHNICAL RISK INTO MEANINGFUL BUSINESS INSIGHT

Paula is energized by the deadline-driven nature of risk assessments and tackling complex sites.



Curiosity, hands-on problem-solving, and a willingness to learn by doing have defined Paula's career path. Drawn initially to kinesiology through her involvement in competitive sports, she later pursued engineering with encouragement from family members who recognized her aptitude in math and science.

Career Path

Paula's professional journey started at the University of Waterloo in the Chemical Engineering program. Her internships immersed her in laboratory and field environments, including work at an automotive manufacturing firm in R&D and QA/QC, before moving into equipment manufacturing. At one of the research facilities, she was given a piece of welding equipment and told to "make it work." Through persistence and experimentation, she succeeded—and went on to write the user manual!

A second internship took her to Phoenix, Arizona, where she worked in the intense heat collecting field samples and

learning the discipline of proper bottling, labeling, and documentation. She balanced those demanding experiences with life in a student dorm, fully engaging in American college life along the way.

After graduating in 2006, Paula joined Conestoga Rovers in Ontario (now GHD), where she spent a decade developing technical depth across multiple departments and projects. After the birth of her son, she stepped away for a year before returning to the profession. With a strong foundation behind her, she was encouraged to apply for a promotional role at Geosyntec and was hired.

“Follow opportunities when they are available to you but UNDERSTAND THAT YOU CANNOT TAKE ON EVERYTHING.”

Since joining Geosyntec, Paula has assumed broader



responsibilities and now serves as a Senior Principal in the due diligence practice. Her work spans health and safety, brownfields redevelopment, sustainability, ESG, and risk management, and she takes pride in translating technical risk into meaningful business insight. She is energized by the fast-paced, deadline-driven nature of risk assessment work and by the opportunity to tackle complex sites with highly skilled teams.

Building Resilience

Over the course of Paula's career, supportive mentors have guided and helped shape her professional growth. Early in her field career, she sometimes faced skepticism when directing crews in predominantly male environments, but by proving her ability through her work, she earned respect and overcame those challenges without escalation.

Those early years were demanding, marked by long field days, travel, and tough university and project schedules. By sticking with those challenges and seeing difficult work through, Paula fostered the resilience that continues to serve her today. That persistence defines her approach, and she has yet to encounter a setback she could not overcome.

One of the more personal challenges she has navigated is learning when to say "no." With so many interesting projects and opportunities, finding balance and being comfortable declining work has been an important part of her growth.

“There are so many exciting and interesting projects, opportunities, and things you want to learn about that it is sometimes difficult to say 'no' and **MANAGE THAT BALANCE.**”

Foundations of Success

Perseverance and an outgoing personality have been key to Paula's success, allowing her to bridge technical expertise with clear communication of business risk. As a woman and an engineer, she has learned the importance of being assertive, adaptable, and effective in communicating with different kinds of people.

What Paula values most in environmental consulting is personal connections. The friendships she developed through university, sports, committees, and social circles overlap into a close-knit professional community she values

deeply. It's a network of smart, good-natured people she considers a true privilege to work alongside.

“You have to be **OUTSPOKEN AND ASSERTIVE** in certain situations.”

Athletics is another place where Paula brings intensity and discipline. She has played competitive basketball, soccer, and ultimate frisbee, goes to the gym, and enjoys running. It was through ultimate frisbee that she met her husband and was introduced to Geosyntec through friends. That same circle of friends remains close today, reinforcing her belief in the value of strong relationships both professionally and personally. Her advice to other women entering the environmental industry is simple: seek out diverse projects and collaborators, never stop learning, and build a full life beyond professional demands.

“Seek out diverse projects and collaborators, never stop learning, and **BUILD A FULL LIFE BEYOND PROFESSIONAL DEMANDS.**”

What's next for Paula? She plans to continue at a senior level with Geosyntec, translating her knowledge, developing stronger teams, mentoring others, and tackling exciting new projects. 🌈



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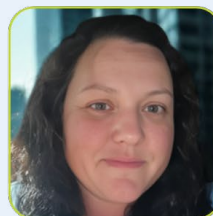
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