



Police and Detectives

Summary



Police officers, detectives, and game wardens enforce laws to protect people and their property.

Quick Facts: Police and Detectives

2015 Median Pay	\$60,270 per year \$28.97 per hour
Typical Entry-Level Education	See How to Become One
Work Experience in a Related Occupation	See How to Become One
On-the-job Training	Moderate-term on-the-job training
Number of Jobs, 2014	806,400
Job Outlook, 2014-24	4% (Slower than average)
Employment Change, 2014-24	33,100

[What Police and Detectives Do](#)

Police officers protect lives and property. Detectives and criminal investigators, who are sometimes called *agents* or *special agents*, gather facts and collect evidence of possible crimes.

[Work Environment](#)

Police and detective work can be physically demanding, stressful, and dangerous. Police officers have one of the highest rates of injuries and illnesses of all occupations. Working around the clock in shifts is common.

[How to Become a Police Officer or Detective](#)

Education requirements range from a high school diploma to a college degree. Most police and detectives must graduate from their agency's training academy before completing a period of on-the-job training. Candidates must be U.S. citizens, usually at least 21 years old, and able to meet rigorous physical and personal qualifications.

[Pay](#)

The median annual wage for police and detectives was \$60,270 in May 2015.

Job Outlook

Employment of police and detectives is projected to grow 4 percent from 2014 to 2024, slower than the average for all occupations. The continued desire for public safety is expected to lead to new openings for officers, although demand may vary by location.

State & Area Data

Explore resources for employment and wages by state and area for police and detectives.

Similar Occupations

Compare the job duties, education, job growth, and pay of police and detectives with similar occupations.

More Information, Including Links to O*NET

Learn more about police and detectives by visiting additional resources, including O*NET, a source on key characteristics of workers and occupations.

What Police and Detectives Do



Police officers use computers to check license information.

Police officers protect lives and property. Detectives and criminal investigators, who are sometimes called *agents* or *special agents*, gather facts and collect evidence of possible crimes.

Duties

Police officers, detectives, and criminal investigators typically do the following:

- Enforce laws
- Respond to emergency and nonemergency calls
- Patrol assigned areas
- Conduct traffic stops and issue citations
- Search for vehicle records and warrants using computers in the field
- Obtain warrants and arrest suspects
- Collect and secure evidence from crime scenes
- Observe the activities of suspects
- Write detailed reports and fill out forms
- Prepare cases and testify in court

Police officers pursue and apprehend people who break the law. They then warn, cite, or arrest them. Most police officers patrol their jurisdictions and investigate suspicious activity. They also respond to calls, issue traffic tickets, and give first aid to accident victims.

Detectives perform investigative duties, such as gathering facts and collecting evidence.

The daily activities of police and detectives vary with their occupational specialty, such as canine units and special weapons and tactics (SWAT). Job duties differ at the local, state, or federal level. Duties differ among federal agencies because they enforce different aspects of the law. Regardless of job duties or location, police officers and detectives at all levels must write reports and keep detailed records that will be needed if they testify in court. Most carry law enforcement tools, such as radios, handcuffs, and guns.

State and Local Law Enforcement

Uniformed police officers have general law enforcement duties. They wear uniforms that allow the public to easily recognize them as police officers. They have regular patrols and also respond to emergency and nonemergency calls. During patrols, officers look for any signs of criminal activity and may conduct searches and arrest suspected criminals.

Some police officers work only on a specific type of crime, such as narcotics. Officers, especially those working in large departments, may work in special units, such as horseback, motorcycle, canine corps, and special weapons and tactics (SWAT). Typically, officers must work as patrol officers for a certain number of years before they may be appointed to a special unit.

Some agencies, such as public college and university police forces, public school police, and transit police, have special geographic and enforcement responsibilities.

State police officers, sometimes called *state troopers* or *highway patrol officers*, have many of the same duties as other police officers, but they may spend more time enforcing traffic laws and issuing traffic citations. State police officers have authority to work anywhere in the state and are frequently called on to help other law enforcement agencies, especially those in rural areas or small towns.

Transit and railroad police patrol railroad yards and transit stations. They protect property, employees, and passengers from crimes such as thefts and robberies. They remove trespassers from railroad and transit properties and check IDs of people who try to enter secure areas.

Sheriffs and deputy sheriffs enforce the law on the county level. Sheriffs' departments tend to be relatively small. Sheriffs are usually elected by the public and do the same work as a local or county police chief. Some sheriffs' departments do the same work as officers in urban police departments. Others mainly operate the county jails and provide services in local courts. Police and sheriffs' deputies who provide security in city and county courts are sometimes called [bailiffs](#).

Detectives and criminal investigators are uniformed or plainclothes investigators who gather facts and collect evidence for criminal cases. They conduct interviews, examine records, observe the activities of suspects, and participate in raids and arrests. Detectives usually specialize in investigating one type of crime, such as homicide or fraud. Detectives are typically assigned cases on a rotating basis and work on them until an arrest and trial are completed or until the case is dropped.

Fish and game wardens enforce fishing, hunting, and boating laws. They patrol fishing and hunting areas, conduct search and rescue operations, investigate complaints and accidents, and educate the public about laws pertaining to the outdoors. Federal fish and game wardens are often referred to as Federal Wildlife Officers.

Federal Law Enforcement

Federal law enforcement officials carry out many of the same duties that other police officers do, and they also have jurisdiction over the entire country. Many federal agents are highly specialized. The following are examples of federal agencies in which officers and agents enforce particular types of laws.

- [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) (FBI) agents are the federal government's principal investigators, responsible for enforcing more than 200 categories of federal statutes and conducting sensitive national security investigations.
- [Drug Enforcement Administration](#) (DEA) agents enforce laws and regulations relating to illegal drugs.
- [United States Secret Service](#) uniformed officers protect the President, the Vice President, their immediate

families, and other public officials. Other Secret Service agents investigate financial crimes.

- [Federal Air Marshals](#) provide air security by guarding against attacks targeting U.S. aircraft, passengers, and crews.
- [U.S. Border Patrol](#) agents protect the U.S. land and sea boundaries.

See the [Contacts for More Info](#) section for additional information about federal law enforcement agencies.

Work Environment



Police and detectives regularly work with crime and accident scenes.

Police and detectives held about 806,400 jobs in 2014. Most police and detectives work for local governments and some work for state governments or the federal government.

Police and detective work can be physically demanding, stressful, and dangerous. Officers must be alert and ready to react throughout their entire shift. Officers regularly work at crime and accident scenes and deal with the death and suffering that they encounter there. Although a career in law enforcement may be stressful, many officers find it rewarding to help members of their communities.

The jobs of some federal agents, such as [U.S. Secret Service](#) and [DEA](#) special agents, require extensive travel, often on short notice. These agents may relocate a number of times over the course of their careers. Some special agents, such as [U.S. Border Patrol](#) agents, may work outdoors in rugged terrain and in all kinds of weather.

Injuries and Illnesses

Police and sheriff's patrol officers have one of the highest rates of injuries and illnesses of all occupations. They may face physical injuries during conflicts with criminals and motor-vehicle pursuits or when exposed to other high-risk situations or diseases. Transit and railroad police also have a high rate of injuries and illnesses.

Work Schedules

Uniformed officers, detectives, agents, and wardens usually work full time. Paid overtime is common. Shift work is necessary because the public must be protected at all times.

How to Become a Police Officer or Detective



Police and detectives must use good judgment and have strong communication skills when gathering facts about a crime.

Education requirements range from a high school diploma to a college degree. Most police and detectives must graduate from their agency's training academy before completing a period of on-the-job training. Candidates must be U.S. citizens, usually at least 21 years old, and able to meet rigorous physical and personal qualification standards. A felony conviction or drug use may disqualify a candidate.

Education

Police and detective applicants must have at least a high school diploma or equivalent, although many federal agencies and some police departments require some college coursework or a college degree. Many community colleges, 4-year colleges, and universities offer programs in law enforcement and criminal justice, and agencies may offer financial assistance to officers who pursue these, or related, degrees. Knowledge of a foreign language is an asset in many federal agencies and geographical regions.

Fish and game wardens applying for federal jobs with the [U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service](#) typically need a college degree; and those applying to work for a state's natural resources department often need a high school diploma or some college study in a related field, such as biology or natural resources management.

Federal agencies typically require a bachelor's degree. For example, [FBI](#) and [DEA](#) special agent applicants are often college graduates.

State and local agencies encourage applicants to continue their education after high school, by taking courses and training related to law enforcement. Many applicants for entry-level police jobs have taken some college classes, and a significant number are college graduates. Many community colleges, 4-year colleges, and universities offer programs in law enforcement and criminal justice. Many agencies offer financial assistance to officers who pursue these or related degrees.

Training

Candidates for appointment usually attend a training academy before becoming an officer. Training includes classroom instruction in state and local laws and constitutional law, civil rights, and police ethics. Recruits also receive training and supervised experience in areas such as patrol, traffic control, firearm use, self-defense, first aid, and emergency response.

Federal law enforcement agents undergo extensive training, usually at the U.S. Marine Corps base in Quantico, Virginia, or at a [Federal Law Enforcement Training Center](#) .

Work Experience in a Related Occupation

Detectives normally begin their careers as police officers before being promoted to detective.

FBI special agent applicants typically must have at least 3 years of professional work experience in areas ranging from computer science to accounting.

Other Experience

Some police departments have cadet programs for people interested in a career in law enforcement who do not yet meet age requirements for becoming an officer. These cadets do clerical work and attend classes until they reach the minimum age requirement and can apply for a position with the regular force. Military or police experience may be considered beneficial for potential cadets.

Cadet candidates must be U.S. citizens, usually be at least 21 years old, have a driver's license, and meet specific physical qualifications. Applicants may have to pass physical exams of vision, hearing, strength, and agility, as well as written exams. Previous work or military experience is often seen as a plus. Candidates typically go through a series of interviews and may be asked to take lie detector and drug tests. A felony conviction may disqualify a candidate.

Advancement

Police officers usually become eligible for promotion after a probationary period. Promotions to corporal, sergeant, lieutenant, and captain usually are made according to a candidate's position on a promotion list, as determined by scores on a written examination and on-the-job performance. In large departments, promotion may enable an officer to become a detective or to specialize in one type of police work, such as working with juveniles.

Important Qualities

Communication skills. Police, detectives, and fish and game wardens must be able to speak with people when gathering facts about a crime and to express details about a given incident in writing.

Empathy. Police officers need to understand the perspectives of a wide variety of people in their jurisdiction and have a willingness to help the public.

Good judgment. Police and detectives must be able to determine the best way to solve a wide array of problems quickly.

Leadership skills. Police officers must be comfortable with being a highly visible member of their community, as the public looks to them for assistance in emergency situations.

Perceptiveness. Officers, detectives, and fish and game wardens must be able to anticipate a person's reactions and understand why people act a certain way.

Physical stamina. Officers and detectives must be in good physical shape, both to pass required tests for entry into the field, and to keep up with the daily rigors of the job.

Physical strength. Police officers must be strong enough to physically apprehend offenders.

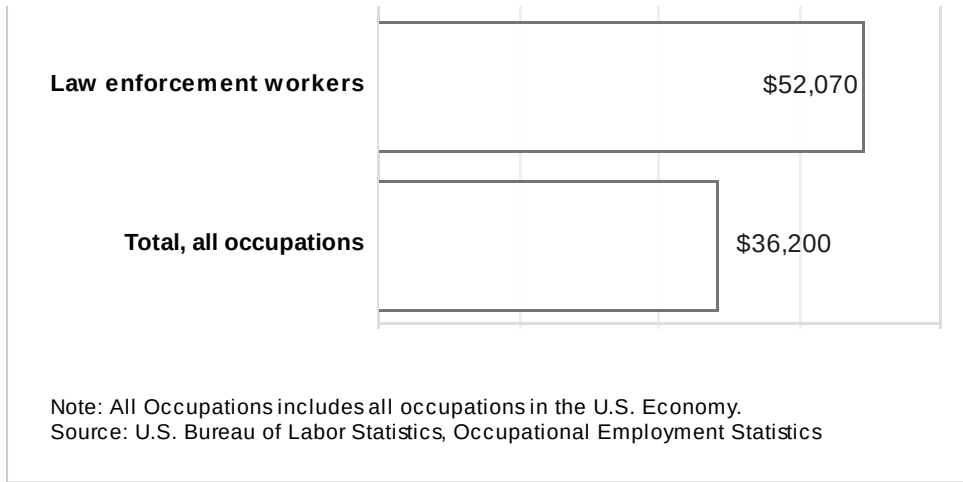
Pay

Police and Detectives

Median annual wages, May 2015

Police and detectives

\$60,270



The median annual wage for police and detectives was \$60,270 in May 2015. The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$34,170, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$100,560.

Median annual wages for police and detectives in May 2015 were as follows:

Detectives and criminal investigators	\$77,210
Transit and railroad police	59,670
Police and sheriff's patrol officers	58,320
Fish and game wardens	52,780

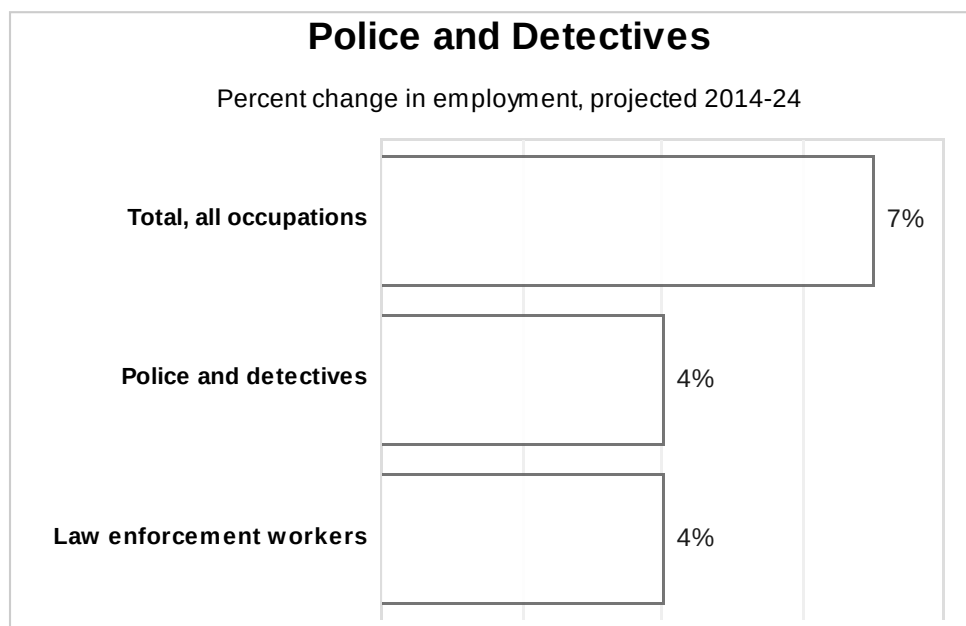
Many agencies provide officers with an allowance for uniforms, as well as extensive benefits and the option to retire at an age that is younger than the typical retirement age.

Uniformed officers, detectives, agents, and wardens usually work full time. Paid overtime is common. Shift work is necessary, because the public must be protected at all times.

Union Membership

Most police and detectives belonged to a union in 2014.

Job Outlook



Note: All Occupations includes all occupations in the U.S. Economy.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

Employment of police and detectives is projected to grow 4 percent from 2014 to 2024, slower than the average for all occupations.

While a continued desire for public safety is expected to result in a need for more officers, demand for employment is expected to vary depending on location, driven largely by local and state budgets. Even with crime rates falling in the last few years, demand for police services to maintain and improve public safety is expected to continue.

Job Prospects

Overall job prospects are expected to be good. Applicants with a bachelor's degree and law enforcement or military experience, especially investigative experience, as well as those who speak more than one language, should have the best job opportunities.

Because the level of government spending determines the level of employment for police and detectives, the number of job opportunities can vary from year to year and from place to place.

Employment projections data for police and detectives, 2014-24

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2014	Projected Employment, 2024	Change, 2014-24		Employment by Industry
				Percent	Numeric	
Police and detectives	—	806,400	839,500	4	33,100	—
Detectives and criminal investigators	33-3021	116,700	115,300	-1	-1,400	[XLSX]
Fish and game wardens	33-3031	6,200	6,300	2	100	[XLSX]
Police and sheriff's patrol officers	33-3051	680,000	714,200	5	34,200	[XLSX]
Transit and railroad police	33-3052	3,600	3,700	4	100	[XLSX]

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

State & Area Data

Occupational Employment Statistics (OES)

The [Occupational Employment Statistics](#) (OES) program produces employment and wage estimates annually for over 800 occupations. These estimates are available for the nation as a whole, for individual states, and for metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas. The link(s) below go to OES data maps for employment and wages by state and area.

- [Detectives and criminal investigators](#)
- [Fish and game wardens](#)
- [Police and sheriff's patrol officers](#)
- [Transit and railroad police](#)

Projections Central

Occupational employment projections are developed for all states by Labor Market Information (LMI) or individual state Employment Projections offices. All state projections data are available at www.projectionscentral.com. Information on this site allows projected employment growth for an occupation to be compared among states or to be compared within one state. In addition, states may produce projections for areas; there are links to each state's websites where these data may be retrieved.




Career InfoNet

America's Career InfoNet includes hundreds of [occupational profiles](#) with data available by state and metro area. There are links in the left-hand side menu to compare occupational employment by state and occupational wages by local area or metro area. There is also a [salary info tool](#) to search for wages by zip code.

Similar Occupations

This table shows a list of occupations with job duties that are similar to those of police and detectives.

	OCCUPATION	JOB DUTIES	ENTRY-LEVEL EDUCATION	2015 MEDIAN PAY
	Correctional Officers and Bailiffs	Correctional officers are responsible for overseeing individuals who have been arrested and are awaiting trial or who have been sentenced to serve time in jail or prison. Bailiffs are law enforcement officers who maintain safety and order in courtrooms.	High school diploma or equivalent	\$40,580
	EMTs and Paramedics	Emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and paramedics care for the sick or injured in emergency medical settings. People's lives often depend on the quick reaction and competent care provided by these workers. EMTs and paramedics respond to emergency calls, performing medical services and transporting patients to medical facilities.	Postsecondary nondegree award	\$31,980
	Firefighters	Firefighters control and put out fires, and respond to emergency situations where life, property, or the environment is at risk.	Postsecondary nondegree award	\$46,870
	Private Detectives	Private detectives and investigators search for information about legal, financial, and personal matters. They offer many services, such as verifying	High school diploma or equivalent	\$45,610

	<u>and Investigators</u>	people's backgrounds and statements, finding missing persons, and investigating computer crimes.		
	<u>Probation Officers and Correctional Treatment Specialists</u>	Probation officers and correctional treatment specialists monitor and work with probationers to prevent them from committing new crimes.	Bachelor's degree	\$49,360
	<u>Security Guards and Gaming Surveillance Officers</u>	Security guards and gaming surveillance officers patrol and protect property against theft, vandalism, terrorism, and illegal activity.	High school diploma or equivalent	\$24,680

Contacts for More Information

For general information about sheriffs, visit

[National Sheriffs' Association](#)

For information about chiefs of police, visit

[International Association of Chiefs of Police](#)

For more information about careers in state and local law enforcement, visit

[Bureau of Justice Assistance](#)

[International Association of Chiefs of Police](#)

For more information about federal law enforcement, visit

[Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives](#)

[Drug Enforcement Administration](#)

[Federal Bureau of Investigation](#)

[U.S. Customs and Border Protection](#)

[U.S. Department of Homeland Security](#)

[U.S. Marshals Service](#)

[United States Secret Service](#)

[U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service](#)

O*NET

[Criminal Investigators and Special Agents](#)

[Detectives and Criminal Investigators](#)

[Fish and Game Wardens](#)

[Immigration and Customs Inspectors](#)

[Intelligence Analysts](#)

[Police Detectives](#)

[Police Identification and Records Officers](#)

[Police Patrol Officers](#)

[Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers](#)

[Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs](#)

[Transit and Railroad Police](#)

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