

Starter Tool Kits

What a man needs on day one, by trade: what he buys, what the employer should provide, and what it costs. Reference file for the Work Desk. Version 2.1. Prices checked September 16, 2026; the rules, fees and certification costs re-verified September 20, 2026 against the source pages; corrections September 21. ~ means an estimate with no published price found. Check before you buy.

An empty tool belt fills one tool at a time. Buy the list you're handed, not the catalog.

Before anything else: how to use this desk

To ask for help with a list. Call or text (804) 790-9169 and say "Work Desk." You will be asked three things: which trade, which school or employer, and whether you have their list yet. If you do not, the desk helps you get it. Or email shodongilliam6@gmail.com with "Work Desk" in the subject. One business day to answer.

To give tools or gear. Call or email the same way and say what you have. What the desk takes: clean hand tools, tool bags and pouches, safety-toe boots in wearable condition, work clothes, headlamps and flashlights. Pickup or drop-off is arranged by phone; there is no drop box. Tools are handed to a man against a real list, never sold. Money is a different door — the Support page on the website — and no cash moves through this desk.

On money for tools. BMV does not have a tool fund, and this desk does not hand out money. The money that does exist for training is listed on the website's Desks page — FastForward, the workforce center, G3, Workforce Pell, the mikeroweWORKS scholarship — and it is paid to the school or the student by those programs, not by BMV. If that changes, this page will say so. Until it does, plan to buy the kit yourself, mid-grade, one tool at a time.

Buying rules

1. **Get the list before you buy.** Buy only what the program or employer puts in writing. Every shop is a little different.
2. **Safety gear is the employer's to pay for — on the job.** OSHA requires an employer to provide the protective equipment the job requires at no cost: hard hats, safety glasses, hearing protection, job-specific gloves, hi-vis, fall protection. The worker pays for ordinary safety-toe boots he can wear off the job, prescription safety glasses, everyday clothes, and anything used only for weather — coats, rain gear, rubber boots, sunscreen. If he loses a piece of PPE or breaks it on purpose, the replacement is on him. (29 CFR 1926.95(d); 29 CFR 1910.132(h)) **Where a list below shows a safety item as his anyway, it is for one of three reasons:** a school's own list makes students own it for class; he is working as a contractor or owner-operator, where the rule does not reach; or it is a personal spare he wants in his own bag. Each such item is marked *optional* below. Never buy it first because a list on the internet said so — ask the employer.
3. **Tools can't take your pay below minimum wage.** If an employer requires you to buy tools, the cost can't push your pay for that week below minimum wage or overtime pay. (29 CFR 531.35)

4. **Beyond taxes and court orders, nothing comes out of your check without your signature.** Virginia lets an employer withhold payroll and withholding taxes and anything the law itself requires — a child-support order, a garnishment. For anything else, including tools, uniforms or a shortage, the employer needs your written, signed permission first. (Va. Code § 40.1-29(D))
5. **Mid-grade, not premium.** Solid tools from the hardware store do the job. Add tools when the work shows you what you need.
6. **Mark them and keep the receipts.** Put your initials on every tool. Keep receipts in one folder and a photo of each on your phone.

What each kit costs him

Trade	His kit	With base kit	Ask first
Electrical	Required list \$171–\$275; full list \$339–\$508	\$386–\$685 (required list)	The JATC's discount set; the employer's own list
Fiber / low-voltage	\$321–\$448	\$536–\$858	What the school or employer supplies
HVAC	\$335–\$623 incl. EPA 608	\$550–\$1,033	The shop's list before buying gauges
Pharma / manufacturing	\$55–\$100	\$140–\$270 (no safety-toe boots)	The employer's footwear rule
Drone inspection	\$175 as an employee pilot (the test)	Own drone, first year, test included: \$1,430–\$3,180	Whether the employer supplies the drone
Power line	\$654–\$1,158	\$779–\$1,408 (lineman boots replace base boots)	Whether climbing gear is supplied (\$873–\$1,118 if not)
CDL	\$347–\$637 (fees, exam and personal kit; the three optional safety items add \$20–\$35)	Already included	Who pays for entry-level driver training

Base kit — every trade

What almost every trade job needs before day one. Split into what he pays for and what the employer should provide.

He buys

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Work boots, safety-toe (ASTM F2413), for construction trades	~\$90–\$160	Not needed for cleanroom work (see manufacturing)
☐	Work pants, long-sleeve shirts, socks	~\$60–\$120	Everyday clothing is the worker's cost
☐	Rain jacket and pants	~\$40–\$80	Weather gear is the worker's cost
☐	Lunch cooler and water jug	~\$25–\$50	

Employer should provide when the job requires it — don't buy first

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Hard hat (Type I)	~\$20–\$40	
☐	Safety glasses (ANSI Z87.1)	~\$5–\$15	Prescription safety glasses are the worker's cost
☐	Hearing protection	~\$5–\$30	
☐	Job-specific gloves	~\$10–\$25	
☐	Hi-vis vest (ANSI Class 2)	~\$10–\$20	

Electrical

The Richmond Electricians' JATC publishes the list every apprentice must have on the job. Buy that first. Ask the JATC about the discounted pre-assembled sets it points apprentices to.

Required by the Richmond JATC

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Side-cutting pliers, 8" or 9"	\$36–\$40	
☐	Tongue-and-groove pliers, 2 pairs (Channellock 430 recommended)	~\$40–\$50	
☐	6-ft inside-reading folding rule	~\$15–\$30	
☐	Pocket knife	~\$10–\$20	
☐	Flat screwdriver (3/16–3/8) and #2 Phillips	~\$10–\$20	
☐	Hacksaw frame	~\$15–\$25	
☐	Torpedo level	\$13–\$20	
☐	Pencils	~\$2–\$5	
☐	Tool pouch or bag	\$30–\$65	Nylon is cheaper than leather

Add when the job calls for it

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Wire stripper	\$21–\$25	
☐	6" diagonal cutters	\$25–\$30	
☐	Needle-nose pliers	~\$20–\$30	
☐	11-in-1 screwdriver / nut driver	\$15–\$18	
☐	25-ft tape measure	\$12–\$15	
☐	Non-contact voltage tester	\$20–\$25	
☐	Hammer, 20–22 oz	~\$20–\$30	
☐	Multimeter	\$35–\$60	Optional in year one

Usually the employer's

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Power tools, benders, bits and blades, test equipment beyond a basic tester	—	Common practice; confirm with the employer

Shortcut: Klein's 6-piece apprentice set (item 94126) was \$99.97 at Home Depot. It covers three pliers, a wire stripper and two screwdrivers, but no tongue-and-groove pliers, rule, level, hacksaw or pouch.

Fiber optic and low-voltage

The expensive gear (fusion splicer, OTDR, power meter, light source, cleaver) belongs to the employer or school. The tech brings hand tools.

He brings

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Fiber stripper and Kevlar shears kit	\$55–\$60	
☐	Cable jacket slitter / ring tool	~\$15–\$30	
☐	Punch-down tool, 66/110	\$35–\$40	
☐	RJ45 crimper	\$30–\$35	
☐	6" diagonal cutters	\$25–\$30	
☐	9" lineman's pliers	\$36–\$40	
☐	11-in-1 screwdriver	\$15–\$18	
☐	25-ft tape measure	\$12–\$15	
☐	Torpedo level	\$13–\$20	
☐	Utility knife / splicing scissors	~\$10–\$20	
☐	Jab (keyhole) saw	~\$10–\$20	
☐	Headlamp	~\$15–\$30	
☐	Non-contact voltage tester	\$20–\$25	
☐	Tool pouch	\$30–\$65	

Usually the employer's or school's

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Fusion splicer, OTDR, power meter, light source, cleaver, fiber identifier, cleaning supplies	—	Costs thousands — not a worker purchase
☐	Visual fault locator pen	\$11–\$96	Some techs buy their own later

HVAC

Start with hand tools and a clamp meter. Gauges and a micron gauge often come in year one, after the shop says so. The big machines stay on the truck.

Start kit

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Multi-bit screwdriver	\$15–\$18	
☐	Nut drivers, 1/4" and 5/16"	~\$10–\$20	
☐	Lineman's pliers	\$36–\$40	
☐	Diagonal cutters	\$25–\$30	
☐	Slip-joint pliers	~\$10–\$20	
☐	10" adjustable wrench	~\$15–\$25	
☐	25-ft tape measure	\$12–\$15	
☐	Utility knife	~\$10–\$20	
☐	Wire stripper	\$21–\$25	
☐	Clamp multimeter	~\$60–\$140	
☐	Pocket (stick) thermometer	~\$10–\$25	
☐	Tubing cutter and deburrer	~\$30–\$50	
☐	Refrigeration service valve wrench	\$9–\$15	
☐	Tool bag	~\$30–\$60	
☐	Headlamp	~\$15–\$30	

Year one, when the shop asks

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Gauge manifold with hoses	~\$60–\$130	
☐	Cordless drill/impact kit	\$150–\$160	
☐	Flaring/swaging kit	\$100–\$110	

Certification

	Item	Price	Note
☐	EPA Section 608 certification test, Universal	\$27–\$90	Required to buy refrigerant and to service equipment. Good for life, no renewal. Online proctored from Mainstream Engineering \$27–\$65; ESCO \$60–\$85; HVAC Excellence \$80–\$90 in person. Retakes are per section and cost more than passing once

Usually the employer's

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Recovery machine, vacuum pump, recovery tanks, torch set, nitrogen	—	Common practice; confirm

Pharmaceutical and advanced manufacturing

The lightest kit. Cleanroom gowning (coveralls, hood, boots, gloves, mask) is site gear. Jewelry, nail polish and cosmetics stay home.

He brings

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Comfortable, slip-resistant, closed-toe shoes	~\$50–\$90	Check the employer's footwear rule first
☐	Small notebook and pens for training	~\$5–\$10	

Maintenance technicians only — ask first

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Basic hand-tool set and multimeter	~\$150–\$300	

Usually the employer's

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Gowns, hoods, cleanroom boots, gloves, masks	—	Standard practice; confirm

Civica's manufacturing technician posting describes a six-month paid training program. Plain clothes that fit under a gown are enough.

Drone inspection

The certificate is his. The drone may be the employer's. Ask before buying one. First year with his own drone, everything below included: \$1,430–\$3,180.

He pays

	Item	Price	Note
☐	FAA Part 107 knowledge test (at a PSI center; bring photo ID)	\$175	Confirm the fee at faa.psiexams.com
☐	Recurrent training every 24 months	—	Free, online

Only if he flies his own drone

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Drone registration, per drone, 3 years	\$5	Required for any drone flown for work, even one under 250 grams
☐	Inspection-capable starter drone with spare batteries	~\$750–\$1,500	DJI Mini 4 Pro listed at \$759
☐	Liability insurance, per year	~\$500–\$1,500	\$1M coverage suggested

DJI has been on the FCC Covered List since December 23, 2025. That blocks new DJI models from coming in. Models approved before then — Mini 4 Pro, Air 3S, Mavic 4 Pro and older — are still legal to buy, fly and use under Part 107, but stock shrinks as it sells. Non-DJI makers (Autel, Potensic, Skydio) are the other road; price them before buying, and ask the employer first either way.

Power line worker

The costly kit. Ask the school or employer what they supply before buying climbing gear. SVCC's program office: 434-292-3101.

He brings

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Lineman boots	\$255–\$518	
☐	9" lineman's pliers	\$36–\$40	
☐	Skinning knife	\$24–\$30	
☐	6-in-1 ratcheting bell wrench	\$110	
☐	12" tongue-and-groove pliers	\$25	
☐	10" and 12" adjustable wrenches	~\$35–\$60	
☐	22-oz hammer	~\$20–\$35	
☐	Fiberglass folding ruler	~\$20–\$35	
☐	Demolition screwdriver	~\$10–\$20	
☐	Leather work gloves	~\$15–\$30	SVCC's list; on a job, required gloves are the employer's
☐	Bucket bag and ditty bag	~\$45–\$90	
☐	Gaff guards	\$9–\$15	Personal — always his own
☐	DOT medical exam	\$50–\$150	Some employers pay it

Climbing set — only if the school or employer doesn't supply it

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Climbers (hooks)	\$342	
☐	Body belt	\$214–\$362	
☐	Positioning strap	\$185–\$197	
☐	Climber pads	\$132–\$217	

Usually the employer's

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Rubber gloves and sleeves, hot sticks, voltage testers, grounds, FR clothing, fall protection	—	

SVCC's Power Line Worker program lists 11 weeks and \$14,100 and includes CDL, OSHA 10, NCCER Level 1 and flagger training. FastForward may cover part of it. Its page doesn't say what gear is supplied.

CDL driver

Fees and a personal kit. This list already covers his base items. Federal entry-level driver training (ELDT) is usually the biggest cost, and some carriers pay it.

Virginia and federal fees

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Commercial learner's permit (hold at least 14 days)	\$3	
☐	CDL, 8 years, no endorsements	\$64	Endorsements add \$1 per year each; hazmat \$83 (\$41 with TWIC)
☐	DOT medical exam	\$50–\$150	Examiner must be on the FMCSA registry

Personal kit

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Work gloves	~\$15–\$25	
☐	Headlamp	~\$20–\$35	
☐	Flashlight	~\$15–\$30	
☐	Tire pressure gauge	~\$10–\$25	
☐	Rain jacket	~\$30–\$60	
☐	Work boots	~\$80–\$150	
☐	First-aid kit	~\$15–\$25	
☐	Cooler	~\$25–\$40	
☐	Phone mount and charger	~\$20–\$30	

Employer should provide if the job requires it — optional as a personal spare

	Item	Price	Note
☐	Hi-vis vest	~\$10–\$15	Required at many yards and docks; the carrier pays if it requires it. Owner-operators buy their own
☐	Safety glasses	~\$5–\$10	Same rule. Many drivers keep a spare pair in the cab
☐	Earplugs	~\$5–\$10	For sleeping in a truck stop as much as for the job — a personal buy

~ Missing a scheduled CDL skills test is reported to cost \$50 at DMV; that fee was not on the DMV page checked September 20, so confirm it when you schedule.

Sources

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3. OSHA PPE payment, general industry: <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-29/subtitle-B/chapter-XVII/part-1910/subpart-I/section-1910.132>
4. Wages free and clear (tool costs): <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-29/subtitle-B/chapter-V/subchapter-B/part-531/subpart-C/section-531.35>
5. Va. Code § 40.1-29 (wage deductions): <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title40.1/chapter3/section40.1-29/>
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9. EPA Section 608 refrigerant sales restriction: <https://www.epa.gov/section608/refrigerant-sales-restriction> · test cost range: <https://epa608practicetest.net/cost-and-exam-fees.html> · <https://tradecareerpath.com/guides/epa-608-certification/>
10. Civica manufacturing technician posting: <https://jobs.biospace.com/job/3071584/manufacturing-technician-1st-shift/?TrackID=22>
11. FAA Part 107: https://www.faa.gov/uas/commercial_operators/become_a_drone_pilot · registration: https://www.faa.gov/uas/getting_started/register_drone · test fee: <https://rotatepilot.com/guides/part-107-test-cost-and-scheduling> · DJI/FCC: <https://uavcoach.com/dji-ban/> · DJI store: <https://store.dji.com/content/dji-mini-4-pro-vs-dji-air-3s-vs-dji-mavic-3-pro>
12. SVCC Power Line Worker: <https://southside.edu/power-line-worker> · lineman boots: <https://www.jharlen.com/c-178-lineman-boots.aspx> · climbing gear: <https://toolup.com/collections/klein-tools-lineman-climbing-equipment> · employer-supplied gear: <https://www.powerlinemanjobs.com/essential-lineman-tools-list-for-apprentices-and-crews>
13. Virginia DMV CDL fees: <https://www.dmv.virginia.gov/licenses-ids/cdl/applying> · DOT physical cost: <https://bettercare.com/costs/dot-physical-cost> · ELDT: <https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/registration/commercial-drivers-license/entry-level-driver-training-eldt>

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