

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. Prices checked September 16, 2026 and the rules, fees and certification costs re-verified September 20, 2026 against the source pages. ~ 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.

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.** OSHA requires employers to provide required protective equipment 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))
- 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. Nothing comes out of your check without your signature.** In Virginia an employer needs your written, signed permission to take money from your wages. (Va. Code § 40.1-29)
- 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	Own drone, first year: \$1,255–\$3,005	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	\$367–\$672	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 splitter / 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.

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	

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	
Hi-vis vest	~\$10–\$15	

Rain jacket	~\$30–\$60	
Work boots	~\$80–\$150	
Safety glasses	~\$5–\$10	
Earplugs	~\$5–\$10	
First-aid kit	~\$15–\$25	
Cooler	~\$25–\$40	
Phone mount and charger	~\$20–\$30	

~ 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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5. Va. Code § 40.1-29 (wage deductions): <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title40.1/chapter3/section40.1-29/>
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