

U.S. Office of Personnel Management  
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness  
Classification Appeal and FLSA Programs

Atlanta Oversight Division  
75 Spring Street, SW., Suite 972  
Atlanta, GA 30303-3109

**Pay Category Appeal Decision**  
**Under section 5103 of title 5, United States Code**

**Appellant:** [Appellant]

**Agency classification:** Electronic Measurement  
Equipment Mechanic  
WG-2602-11

**Organization:** [U.S. Navy]

**OPM decision:** Federal Wage System

**OPM decision number:** C-2602-00-01

/s/  
Kathy Day  
Classification Appeals Officer

March 28, 2000  
Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, this decision constitutes a certificate that is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the government. There is no right of further appeal. This decision is subject to discretionary review only under conditions and time limits specified in the Introduction to the Position Classification Standards, appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

### **Decision sent to:**

[Representative]

[HRO Director]

Ms. Sharon Stewart (Acting)  
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Nebraska Avenue Complex  
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Ms. Janice W. Cooper  
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## **Introduction**

On December 28, 1999, the Atlanta Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) received a pay category appeal from [appellant] who is assigned to a job in the [organizational location], [geographical location]. His job was changed from General Schedule (GS) to Federal Wage System (FWS) as the result of a classification consistency review by his agency. A subsequent appeal decision issued by the Defense Civilian Personnel Management Service sustained the agency determination that changed his job from Electronics Technician, GS-856-9, to Electronic Measurement Equipment Mechanic, WG-2602-11. The appellant believes that his job should be placed in the GS. We have accepted and decided his appeal under section 5103 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

## **General issues**

The appellant's job was moved from GS to FWS as the result of an OPM directed classification consistency review. In his appeal to the agency, the appellant contends that his agency misapplied OPM guidance related to determining the proper pay system for his position. He also contends that the calibration work he performs is secondary to regular and recurring duties involving providing technical support to weapons systems and consultation services to other technicians and engineers. The appellant believes that these duties are a management requirement and, as such, are more appropriate for inclusion in GS and classifiable as Electronics Technician, GS-856-9, work.

The appellant is one of three appellants, assigned to the same position description, who filed a group appeal. During our review, we determined that the three appellants are not performing identical work. This position was, therefore, separated from the group appeal.

The appellant is currently detailed to another job and has not worked in his job of record for over a year and a half. We have evaluated the work assigned by management in the job description of record [#], as well as information from the supervisor explaining how the position would be expected to function currently if the appellant were not on detail. In reaching our decision, we carefully reviewed the information provided by the appellant, his supervisor, and the agency.

## **Job information**

The appellant, the supervisor and the agency certified the accuracy of the job description.

The mission of the [Branch] is to provide complete mechanical and electrical/electronic calibration support to the [Command] and other fleet activities and organizations. The appellant claims to be involved in the phase noise measurement program; however, the supervisor stated that the phase noise system is not the appellant's responsibility. The purpose of the appellant's job is to test, evaluate, calibrate, and repair electronic, electrical, and electro-mechanical measurement systems including calibration of lower level customer standards. His responsibilities include calibrating, repairing, certifying, maintaining, and modifying automated calibration systems, specialized fleet test equipment and test equipment used in the [Branch]. He independently sets up, maintains, and calibrates precision Automatic Test Equipment. He performs tests on specialized automated test systems to determine compliance with design specifications and makes recommendations for procurement of new reference standards and

equipment that will maintain the measurement capability of the Branch. He may work with technicians and engineers to resolve complex electronic measurement system problems.

The appellant's assignments usually require application of a considerable number of different basic but established methods, procedures, and techniques. The supervisor generally assigns work in terms of scope, objectives, and priorities. The appellant independently plans and carries out the work.

### **Pay category determination**

Section 5102 of 5 U.S.C. requires that a pay category determination be made as the first step in the position classification process. Section 5102(c)(7) exempts from the GS employees in recognized trades or crafts, or other skilled mechanical crafts, or unskilled, semiskilled, or skilled manual labor occupations, and other employees in positions having trade, craft, or laboring experience and knowledge as the paramount requirement. The OPM Introduction to the Position Classification Standards defines paramount requirement as the essential, prerequisite knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to perform the primary duty or responsibility for which the position has been established. Whether particular types of positions are trades, crafts, or manual labor occupations within the meaning of title 5 depends primarily on the most important requirement for the performance of a primary duty or responsibility for which the position exists. If a position clearly requires trade, craft, or laboring experience and knowledge as a requirement for the performance of its primary duty, the position is under the FWS regardless of its organizational location or the nature of the activity in which it exists.

The Introduction goes on to say that "A position is exempt from the General Schedule if its primary duty involves the performance of physical work which requires knowledge or experience of a trade, craft, or manual labor nature," and that "A position is subject to the General Schedule, even if it requires physical work, if its primary duty requires knowledge or experience of an administrative, clerical, scientific, artistic, or technical nature not related to trade, craft, or manual labor work."

The Introduction to the Electronic Equipment Installation and Maintenance Family, WG-2600, provides valuable guidance on differentiating between FWS and GS work. In distinguishing between mechanic (FWS) and technician (GS) work, "the difference between the electronic mechanics and electronic technicians is not so much in the types of skills, knowledges, and abilities possessed but in the degree to which they are possessed and the manner in which they are used." In assessing testing work, performing testing is an "inherent part of a trades function such as repair, maintenance, installation, and fabrication." Such trades work "includes making measurements to diagnose malfunctions, to align and calibrate equipment, and to assure that equipment operates within prescribed standards and tolerances. . . . Positions in which the performance of such testing work is the paramount requirement are trades positions." Testing work is GS technician work when it is "part of engineering functions . . . concerning projects such as the development or evaluation of new or modified electronic systems or monitoring of frequency emissions by licensed stations. In these cases, they are not only doing the testing but evaluate the data and form engineering conclusions as to the acceptability of equipment modifications, validity of testing procedures and data, or legality of operations."

The guidance further states that, although work performed by the mechanic and technician may appear similar on the surface, a "basic difference between the technician and the mechanic is in

the mental approach to the problem faced. The technician uses electronic theory, mathematical knowledge, etc., as the basis for 'new thought' to solve engineering problems in conventional areas of endeavor, e.g., design and construction of amplifier circuits, pulse forming networks, etc. . . . The mechanic, on the other hand, uses a similar background of electronic theory, mathematics, and experience as the basis for 'second thought,' i.e., to follow and understand the design concepts of others, to understand the purpose and operation of parts and circuits, to follow signal flow through assemblies and components and recognize proper wave forms and signal values in order to tune equipment for optimum performance and to locate and correct malfunctions."

The distinction between FWS and GS work "is blurred somewhat by the innovative ability of many experienced electronic mechanics . . . exhibited in the development of shortcut procedures . . . the recognition and recommendation of correction of errors in documentation; or recommendations of methods, design changes, etc., to remedy a deficiency." This guidance also cautions that "it is significant to note that while the mechanic's performance tends toward that of a technician, it is in response to a random condition or need. It is often valuable to and recognized by the activity but it is not an ongoing need of the activity, i.e., is not required by management, and its absence is not cause for negative action by the supervisor against the employee. It is a requirement, however, that the electronics mechanic exercise journeyman level competence in testing, repair, or other assigned work."

While installation, maintenance, repair and testing are mentioned in GS position classification standards, e.g., Engineering Technician, GS-802, and Electronics Technician, GS-856, it is the design, development, planning, and acquisition work that is considered paramount and controls the pay category. Installation, maintenance and other hands-on work covered by these standards are secondary and usually involve an oversight role rather than doing the work.

The appellant's primary and paramount duties flow from the mission and function of the organization in which he works. Those duties involve providing calibration and repair services for test and measurement equipment owners and customers. This work requires trades knowledge of calibration, and knowledge of electrical, electronic, and electro-mechanical principles and theory to calibrate equipment to conform to technical and scientific requirements, to certify its accuracy, and to identify and repair malfunctions. The appellant may use his knowledge of electronic theory and his experience to modify or revise established procedures to devise a needed testing technique or procedure. This is more closely associated with understanding the design of others and being able to follow the operation of the parts and circuits. It does not require the appellant to apply electronic or electrical theories in designing new and unique systems, which is associated with engineering functions. Most of the appellant's work involves applying established calibration approaches and protocols which is typical of higher graded trades work.

## **Decision**

The appellant's job is properly covered by the FWS.