

**U.S. Office of Personnel Management  
Classification Appeal Decision  
Under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code**

**Appellant:** [Appellant]

**Agency classification:** Supervisory Engineering Technician  
(Civil)  
GS-802-11

**Organization:** [Name]  
[Name]  
[Organization/Name]  
[Organization/Name]  
Operations Division  
Mobile District  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Department of the Army  
[Location]

**OPM decision:** Supervisory Engineering Technician  
(Civil)  
GS-802-11

**OPM decision number:** C-0802-11-10

/S/

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Robert D. Hendler  
Classification and Pay Claims  
Program Manager  
Merit System Audit and Compliance

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May 9, 2011  
Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), this decision constitutes a classification certificate which is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the Government. The agency is responsible for reviewing its classification decisions for identical, similar, or related positions to ensure consistency with this decision. There is no right of further appeal. This decision is subject to discretionary review only under conditions and time limits specified in 5 CFR 511.605, 511.613, and 511.614, as cited in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards (Introduction)*, appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

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## **Introduction**

On September 2, 2010, Atlanta Oversight of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [Appellant] and on February 15, 2011, it was transferred to Philadelphia Oversight for adjudication. The appellant's position is currently classified as a Supervisory Engineering Technician (Civil), GS-802-11, and is located in the [Name], [Name], [Organization/Name], [Location/Name], [Organization/Name], Mobile District (District), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), Department of the Army, in [Location]. The appellant believes his position should be upgraded to GS-12. We received the complete agency administrative report on September 29, 2010, and have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

To help decide the appeal, we conducted telephonic interviews with the appellant and his supervisor on March 7 and 8, 2011, respectively. In reaching our classification decision, we have carefully considered all of the information obtained from the interviews, as well as all other information of record provided by the appellant and his agency.

## **Background**

In March 2010, the appellant requested through his supervisor that his position description (PD) be updated. In June 2010, the civilian personnel office for the Corps District reviewed his position, established PD # [Number], and assigned the appellant to the position with no change in classification. Both the appellant and his supervisor have certified the accuracy of this PD. After careful review, we find the appellant's current PD meets the standards of PD adequacy for classification purposes as discussed in section III.E of the *Introduction* and we incorporate it by reference into our decision. The appellant asserts he was not properly credited for all applicable Special Situations under Factor 6 of the General Schedule Supervisory Guide (GSSG) and subsequently filed this appeal with OPM.

## **Position information**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has approximately 34,000 civilian and military personnel delivering engineering services to customers in more than 90 countries worldwide. With environmental sustainability as a guiding principle, the Corps works to strengthen United States' national security by building and maintaining America's infrastructure and providing military facilities where service members train, work, and live. The Corps also researches and develops technology for war fighters while protecting America's interests abroad by using engineering expertise to promote stability and improve quality of life. In addition, the Corps works to energize the economy by dredging America's waterways to support the movement of critical commodities and providing recreation opportunities at our campgrounds, lakes and marinas. There are 45 districts within the Corps.

The District has more than 1,100 civilian and military personnel, and covers over 252,000 square miles, stretching 3,800 miles north to south. The District supports the Army, Air Force, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and other Federal agencies in [Location]. This work includes design and construction management for a multitude of different types of facilities, such

as medical centers, dormitories, aircraft facilities, sewage treatment plans, office complexes and family housing. The District also provides engineering studies and other technical assistance such as master planning, environment management, and real estate support.

Within the Mobile District, the [Organization/Name] purpose is to provide maintenance dredging for navigational interests, both recreational and industrial, on the [Organization/Name], [Location/Name], and Mobile River systems and maintenance for the nine locks and dams and two hydro-electric generating plants on these systems. The [Organization] river systems provide a link from the upper [Name] basin to the port of Mobile. It also connects Mobile with the [Location/Organization] Waterway and 1,600 miles of navigable inland waterways, including the [Name] River and the upper [Name] River. The [Organization] waterway consists of a channel nine feet deep and 200 feet wide from the confluence of the [Name] and [Name] River to the head of navigation on the [Name] near [Location]. The total waterway distance is 457 miles with a lift of 257 feet accomplished by the existence of six locks and dams. The system also provides hydroelectric power, water supply, water quality, flood control, and recreational opportunities. The [Organization/Name] has three divisions: [Name],& [Name], [Name], and [Name] Unit.

The [Name] Unit performs a variety of duties relating to the construction, maintenance, and operation of the [Name] River Systems. These duties include the construction, dredging, disposal area management, snagging, surveying, mapping, and inspection of the [Name] river systems.

The appellant serves as the [Name] within the [Name] Unit. This Section is responsible for the dredging, construction, and surveying activities of the [Name] river systems. The appellant's duties involve planning and managing the accomplishment of complex topographic and automated hydrographic surveying projects and the preparation of original mapping products and Geographical Information System (GIS) databases.

The appellant performs supervisory work which requires accomplishment of work through the combined technical and administrative direction of subordinate employees. The PD shows supervisory work encompasses at least 25 percent of the appellant's time. We concur.

The appellant is the first line supervisor of eight employees, including a Cartographer, GS-1370-11; a "Cartographic Technician" (Engineering Technician (Civil)), GS-802-9; a Geographer, GS-150-11, (the position is currently vacant); three Engineering Technicians (Civil) (surveyors), GS-802-9; and an Engineering Aid, GS-802-3. For purposes of this appeal, we assume the agency has properly classified these positions.

Within the [Name], the surveyor engineering technicians primarily use one-man survey vessels, equipped with multi-transducer sweep systems, which are unique within the Corps and, according to the [Name] Unit, are fairly uncommon in the industry, to collect survey data of the [Name] river systems. The work is divided into three geographic areas, and each surveyor rotates through all three locations on an annual basis. While the surveyors' duty station of record is the [Organization/Location], they each depart the office every Monday morning for their assigned location on the [Name] river systems, which are approximately 120 miles away. The

surveyors work nine hour days and stay in local hotels at night. They return to the office every Friday afternoon and have alternating Fridays off. The appellant directs each surveyor where to survey every morning via telephone.

The surveyors transmit survey data daily to the [Name]. The Cartographer, “Cartographic Technician,” (and Geographer, when the position was occupied), analyze and upload the data to a GIS database and HYPACK, a computer software program developed for the hydrographic and dredging industry. They then produce maps, which are used to determine where to dredge and are shared with the local commercial towing industry, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the general public. The appellant reviews these maps for completeness and to determine if any further analysis or surveying is needed. Occasionally, the appellant prioritizes which survey data the Cartographer, “Cartographic Technician”, and Geographer are to process first.

### **Series, title, and standard determination**

The appellant does not question the agencies use of the Job Family Standard (JFS) for Technical Work in the Engineering and Architecture Group, 0800 for the series and title of his position and, based on a review of the record, we concur. The agency placed the appellant’s position in the Engineering Technician Series, GS-802, with the parenthetical title (Civil) since the work pertains to dredging, construction, and surveying activities, and we concur.

Since the appellant’s position also involves the accomplishment of work through the direction of other people, the GSSG must also be applied. The GSSG is used to grade supervisory work and related managerial responsibilities that require accomplishment of work through the combined technical and administrative direction of others; constitute a major duty occupying at least 25 percent of the position’s time; and meet at least the lowest level of Factor 3 in the GSSG based on supervising Federal civilian employees, Federal military or uniformed service employees, volunteers, or other non-contractor personnel. Work performed by contractors is considered in applying the grading criteria within each factor, provided the position first meets the coverage requirements described above based on supervision of non-contractor personnel. Based on the record, we find the appellant’s position is properly allocated as Supervisory Engineering Technician (Civil), GS-802, according to the titling practices contained in the 0800 JFS and the GSSG.

### **Grade determination**

The grade level criteria in the 0800 JFS are used to evaluate the appellant’s engineering technician responsibilities, and the GSSG is used to evaluate the appellant’s supervisory responsibilities. The overall grade of the position is the highest level of either his supervisory or technician work.

### *Evaluation using the 0800 JFS*

The JFS for Technical Work in the Engineering and Architecture Group, 0800, is written in the FES format. Positions graded under the FES are compared to nine factors. Levels are assigned for each factor, and the points associated with the assigned levels are totaled and converted to a

grade level. Under the FES, each factor-level description in a JFS describes the minimum characteristics needed to receive credit for the described level. Therefore, if a position fails fully to meet the criteria in a factor-level description in any significant aspect, it must be credited at a lower level. Conversely, the position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at a higher level.

The agency did not evaluate the appellant’s duties using the 0800 JFS. The *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards (Introduction)* states:

To classify a supervisory or program management position *in any occupational series, users should:*

Apply criteria for measuring program management work as provided in the standard for the series to which the position is classified or in related standards or guides which measure program management duties and responsibilities.

-and-

Apply the supervisory classification guide to positions whose supervisory duties and responsibilities meet minimum requirements for coverage by the guide.

Accordingly, we have evaluated the appellant’s duties using the 0800 JFS and assigned Levels 1-6, 2-3, 3-3, 4-3, 5-3, 6-3, 7-B, 8-2, and 9-2.

*Summary*

*Factor Level Points*

1.	Knowledge required by the position	1-6	950
2.	Supervisory controls	2-3	275
3.	Guidelines	3-3	275
4.	Complexity	4-3	150
5.	Scope and effect	5-3	150
6.	Personal contacts	6-3	
7.	Purpose of contacts	7-B	110
8.	Physical demands	8-2	20
9.	Work environment	9-2	20
	<i>Total</i>		1950

The total points assigned to the appellant’s position equals 1,950. According to the JFS’s Grade Conversion Table, positions with total point values between 1,855 and 2,100 are properly graded at GS-9.

*Evaluation using the GSSG*

The GSSG is a cross-series guide used to determine the grade level of supervisory positions in the General Schedule. The GSSG has six evaluation factors, each with several factor level definitions and corresponding point values. Positions are evaluated by crediting the points designated for the highest level met under each factor and converting the total to a grade by using the grade conversion table provided in the GSSG.

The appellant contests the agency's assignment of Level 6-3, but agrees with the agency's crediting of Levels 1-2, 2-1, 3-2, 4A-2 and 4B-2, and 5-5. After careful review, we concur with the agency's assignment of the undisputed factors and have credited the position accordingly. Therefore our evaluation will focus on Factor 6.

#### *Factor 6, Other conditions*

This factor measures the extent to which various conditions contribute to the difficulty and complexity of carrying out supervisory duties, authorities, and responsibilities. The *difficulty* of work is measured primarily by the grade level of work credited under factor 5. *Complexity* is measured by the level of coordination required.

To evaluate Factor 6, two steps are used. First, the highest level a position meets fully is initially credited. Then, if the level selected is Level 6-1, 6-2, or 6-3, the Special Situations listed after the factor level definitions are considered. If a position meets three or more of the situations, then a single additional level is added to the level selected in the first step. If the level selected in the first step is Level 6-4, 6-5, or 6-6, the Special Situations may not be considered in determining whether a higher factor level is creditable.

For the first step of this evaluation, the agency credited Level 6-3, corresponding to the GS-9 base level assignment under Factor 5. They did not include the two GS-11 professional positions in their base level determination, and the appellant does not dispute this assessment. We concur in that the appellant does not have full technical responsibility, as discussed further below, over the Cartographer and Geographer positions.

The appellant believes his position meets six of the Special Situations described under this factor: Variety of work, Fluctuating Work or Constantly Changing Deadlines, Physical Dispersion, Impact of Specialized Programs, Changing Technology, and Special Hazard and Safety Conditions. His agency credited his position for the Fluctuating Work or Constantly Changing Deadlines Special Situation. Our analysis of the Special Situations follows.

#### *Variety of Work*

This situation is credited when more than one kind of work, each kind representing a requirement for a distinctly different additional body of knowledge on the part of the supervisor, is present in the work of the unit. A "kind of work" usually will be the equivalent of a classification series. Each "kind of work" requires substantially full qualification in distinctly separate areas, or full knowledge and understanding of rules, regulations, procedures, and subject matter of a distinctly separate area of work. Additionally, to credit "Variety" (1) both technical and administrative



responsibility must be exercised over the work, and (2) the grade level of the work cannot be more than one grade below the base level of work used in Factor 5.

The appellant states he should be credited with this Special Situation because there are three distinct classification series under his supervision: three GS-802-9 Engineering Technicians (Civil) (surveyors); one GS-1370-11 Cartographer; one GS-150-11 Geographer; and one GS-802-9 Engineer Technician (Civil) (“Cartographic Technician”). The appellant has full administrative responsibility over all these positions, as he is responsible for approving leave, completing performance appraisals, recommending awards and training, and performing adverse actions, as necessary. He exercises full technical supervision over the Engineering Technician (Civil) positions, as he is responsible for assigning and reviewing work and assisting the technicians in resolving difficult or unusual technical problems. However, many factors must be considered in determining if the appellant exercises full technical supervision over the professional Cartographer and Geographer positions.

*The Classifier’s Handbook* states:

The decision as to whether or not supervision of positions above the base level fulfills condition (b); i.e., imposes a technical ability and knowledge requirement significantly higher than that needed to review work at the base level, is decided best through a review of work relationships and products and consideration of such issues as the following:

- is the work in question susceptible to technical review; i.e., the grade of the position(s) supervised is not based upon independence of action or unreviewed technical decisions;
- is the work of the position(s) above the base level more difficult to plan, schedule, assign, and/or review;
- to what extent does the technical review differ from that given to work at the base level; i.e., are work products more difficult to review, for example, because of the increased depth and/or breadth of subject matter encompassed;
- does the employee in the supervisory position being evaluated make decisions on technical issues assigned to positions above the base level, or are such matters resolved by subordinate supervisors; and
- does the supervisor possess the kind and level of knowledge and/or credentials appropriate to review technically the nonsupervisory substantive work in positions above the base level

Both the Cartographer and Geographer PDs state the employee receives only general supervision as well as periodic reviews for soundness of the procedures and methods used from the appellant. Our interviews show the appellant reviews the maps produced by the Cartographer and Geographer for completeness and missing areas of coverage. This review does not constitute a full technical cartographic review, but is more akin to a user’s review. While the appellant’s review may be technical from a hydrographic standpoint, he does not possess sufficient cartographic knowledge to conduct a full technical review. In addition, the work of the Cartographer and Geographer positions is typically not more difficult to plan, schedule, or assign than the base level work of the surveyors. While the appellant closely directs the daily work of

the surveyors, he only discusses overall objectives, priorities, and deadlines with the Cartographer and Geographer. He may occasionally prioritize which survey data the Cartographer and Geographer are to process first. However, for the most part, they work independently. Therefore, the appellant does not exercise full technical supervision over the Cartographer and Geographer positions and this situation is not credited.

*Fluctuating work force or constantly changing deadlines*

This situation is credited when the work force supervised by the position has large fluctuations in size (e.g., when there are significant seasonal variations in staff) and these fluctuations impose on the supervisor a substantially greater responsibility for training, adjusting assignments, or maintaining a smooth flow of work while absorbing and releasing employees. Constantly Changing Deadlines may be credited when frequent, abrupt, and unexpected changes in work assignments, goals, and deadlines require the supervisor constantly to adjust operations under the pressure of continuously changing and unpredictable conditions.

The appellant's agency credited this Special Situation. The appellant agrees and states: "Both the field surveying and office cartographic functions of the unit's work duties and practices revolve around constantly changing deadlines in support of our assigned navigation function." He further states the schedule of the dredge function constantly changes and, therefore, impacts the functions in his section, because the surveyors needed to be available to survey before and after each dredge and the Cartographer, "Cartographic Technician", and Geographer need to be available to process the data collected from these surveys.

The record shows the number of dredging operations scheduled each year depends on need and budget. Needs are determined from analysis of existing hydrographic survey data and reports from users of the [Name] river systems such as the commercial towing industry. Prior to and immediately following each dredge, the surveyors need to survey the area in order to assess the success of the dredge. While dredging is scheduled for a particular period of time, it can end early or finish late. Because of this, the surveyors need to be available on short notice to survey after the completion of the dredge.

Both the appellant and his supervisor stated the dredge schedule was ever-changing. The appellant states it changed as often as five to six times per year. His supervisor, however, states it changes two to three times per year. These changes in work may be abrupt and unexpected, but they are not frequent within the meaning of the GSSG and do not produce the pressures of work control and coordination covered under this Special Situation. Therefore, this situation is not credited.

*Physical dispersion*

This situation is credited when a substantial portion of the workload for which the supervisor is responsible is regularly carried out at one or more locations that are physically removed from the main unit (as in different buildings, or widely dispersed locations in a large warehouse or factory building), under conditions that make day-to-day supervision difficult to administer.

The appellant states he should be credited with this Special Situation because: “The three GS-802 Engineer Technicians (Civil) (surveyors) that I supervise work outside the office environment in the field and are physically removed from the main unit while on TDY travel 120+ miles from direct supervision on a daily basis.” Interviews show this situation does make day-to-day supervision difficult to administer, as the appellant is not always able to readily contact the surveyors, because the high trees and the coast line of where they are working often prevents contact via radio. This requires the appellant to constantly coordinate tasks, such as speaking with the surveyors to discuss the upcoming day’s duties. Therefore, this situation is credited.

#### *Impact of specialized programs*

This situation is credited when supervisors are responsible for a significant technical or administrative workload in grades above the level of work credited in Factor 5, provided the grades of this work are not based upon independence of action, freedom from supervision, or personal impact on the job.

The appellant states he should be credited with this Special Situation because he is responsible for significant technical and administrative workload in planning and directing the GS-11 Cartographer and Geographer positions. However, as previously discussed under Variety of Work, the appellant does not exercise full technical supervision over these positions. In addition, both the Cartographer’s and Geographer’s PDs state they receive only general supervision from their supervisor. Also, their PDs and our interviews indicate that while they keep their supervisor informed of all issues, they resolve technical problems independently. Therefore, this situation is not credited.

#### *Changing technology*

This situation is credited when work processes and procedures vary constantly because of the impact of changing technology, creating a requirement for extensive training and guidance of the subordinate staff.

The appellant states he should be credited with this Special Situation because the fields of hydrographic surveying, land and topographic surveying, and GIS and cartographic map processing are constantly changing. He specifically cited the HYPACK software, stating it: “is constantly being changed and updated.” He further stated a new version of this software is released annually and updates are released periodically. For the annual updates, the appellant, the surveyors, and the Cartographer attend a week-long symposium, hosted by the developers of HYPACK, to receive training on the new version of the software. The annual release of a new version of the software and periodic updates do not constitute *constantly* changing technology within the meaning of the GSSG, nor do they contribute to the difficulty and complexity of carrying out supervisory duties. Therefore, this situation is not credited.

#### *Special hazard and safety conditions*

This situation is credited when the supervisory position is regularly made more difficult by the need to make provision for significant unsafe or hazardous conditions occurring during performance of the work of the organization.

The appellant states he should be credited with this Special Situation because he is “constantly changing, updating, and making provisions for the safety of the three GS-802 Engineering Technicians (Civil) (surveyors) as they are tasked to work alone operating survey vessels in remote river locations.” He also states: “Safety is provided and improved through the upkeep and operation of on-board radios, cell phones, satellite phones, GPS location devices, and twin outboard engines on each survey vessel.” In interviews, the appellant and his supervisor emphasized they had to take extra measures to ensure the safety of the surveyors because they were on one-person boats. These measures included additional communications devices, not normally included on larger survey boats.

While the communication devices may be used in the event of an emergency, they are primarily used for communication and not safety. The surveyors’ PD only credits them with Level 9-2 for Work Environment. This factor-level descriptor states work involves regular and recurring exposure to moderate risks and discomforts, as opposed to Level 9-3, which states the work environment involves high risks of exposure to potentially dangerous situations or unusual environmental stress requiring a range of safety and other precautions where conditions cannot be controlled. Therefore, this situation is not credited since the subordinates’ work environment does not reflect the need to make provisions for “significant unsafe or hazardous conditions.”

As previously stated, we concur with the agency’s crediting of Level 6-3 for the first step of the evaluation for this factor. Because this position meets only one Special Situation and not three, an additional level may not be added to the level selected in the first step. Therefore, Level 6-3 (975 points) is credited.

### *Summary*

<i>Factor Level Points</i>			
1.	Program Scope and Effect	1-2	350
2.	Organizational Setting	2-1	100
3.	Supervisory/Managerial Authority	3-2	450
4.	Personal Contacts		
	Nature of Contacts	4A-2	50
	Purpose of Contacts	4B-2	75
5.	Difficulty of Work Directed	5-5	650
6.	Other Conditions	6-3	975
	<i>Total</i>		2,650

The total of 2,650 points falls within the GS-11 range (2355-2750) on the grade conversion table provided in the GSSG.

Engineering technician responsibilities equate to GS-9 and supervisory responsibilities equate to GS-11. Therefore, the appropriate grade for the appellant's position is GS-11.

**Decision**

The position is properly classified as Supervisory Engineering Technician (Civil), GS-802-11.