



## United States Office of Personnel Management

**Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness**  
*Digest of Significant Classification Decisions and Opinions*  
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**Standard:** [Boiler Plant Operator, WG-5402](#) (March 1991)  
**Factor:** Special Additional Responsibilities  
**Issue:** Crediting of shift responsibilities

### **Identification of the Classification Issue**

This issue arose in an Office of Personnel Management region's consideration of an appeal concerning a Boiler Plant Operator position which an agency had downgraded from WG-5402-10 to WG-5402-9. The primary reason for the downgrade was the removal of shift responsibilities from the position. For the majority of his time, the appellant was typically the only operator in an oil operated heating plant. He reported to another employee who operated a plant three blocks away. That employee was not allowed to leave his post to provide on-the-job assistance.

The Office of Personnel Management had to determine whether this degree of responsibility and freedom from supervision warranted an extra grade for shift responsibilities.

### **Resolution**

Under the standard, when shift operators are required to perform additional duties which are more responsible and require more skill and knowledge than those of an operator who is on duty where a supervisor is available to provide guidance and assistance, one additional grade may be added to the job. As found in the standard, these operators may be *in charge* of the complete plant operation and typically must rely on their own judgment to handle any problems that may arise. (Emphasis added.) For example, the shift operator must have knowledge of the entire system in order to locate problems and independently determine action necessary to maintain adequate steam production. In the event of a breakdown or malfunction of equipment, the shift operator is responsible for taking appropriate action.

The Office of Personnel Management reasoned that, even though the appellant's supervisor was typically not present for most of the hours of the evening and night shifts and never during the weekend shifts, the appellant could contact the senior operator by phone for advice and assistance. While the senior operator could not leave his post to provide direct advice and assistance, he could provide advice by phone, call the supervisor at home for assistance, contact the military duty officer for assistance, and contact a roving mechanic who could be onsite within minutes. The appellant was also required to call the senior operator at least once every two hours for safety purposes. At that time, he could report any problems that he was having or problems that he expected.

For those reasons, the Office of Personnel Management found that the appellant's job did not function with the degree of responsibility and independence that warranted an additional grade even though he was typically the only operator at that plant. Consequently, the operator duties were properly classified at the WG-9 grade level.