

§ 1620.17

29 CFR Ch. XIV (7-1-06 Edition)

otherwise equal under the EPA, and there is no substantial difference in the amount or degree of effort which must be expended in performing the jobs under comparison, the jobs may require equal effort in their performance even though the effort may be exerted in different ways on the two jobs. Differences only in the kind of effort required to be expended in such a situation will not justify wage differentials.

(b) *Comparing effort requirements of jobs.* To illustrate the principle of equal effort exerted in different ways, suppose that a male checker employed by a supermarket is required to spend part of his time carrying out heavy packages or replacing stock involving the lifting of heavy items whereas a female checker is required to devote an equal degree of effort during a similar portion of her time to performing fill-in work requiring greater dexterity—such as rearranging displays of spices or other small items. The difference in kind of effort required of the employees does not appear to make their efforts unequal in any respect which would justify a wage differential, where such differences in kind of effort expended to perform the job are not ordinarily considered a factor in setting wage levels. Further, the occasional or sporadic performance of an activity which may require extra physical or mental exertion is not alone sufficient to justify a finding of unequal effort. Suppose, however, that men and women are working side by side on a line assembling parts. Suppose further that one of the men who performs the operations at the end of the line must also lift the assembly, as he completes his part of it, and places it on a waiting pallet. In such a situation, a wage rate differential might be justified for the person (but only for the person) who is required to expend the extra effort in the performance of his job, provided that the extra effort so expended is substantial and is performed over a considerable portion of the work cycle. In general, a wage rate differential based on differences in the degree or amount of effort required for performance of jobs must be applied uniformly to men and women. For example, if all women and some men performing a particular type of job never perform

heavy lifting, but some men do, payment of a higher wage rate to all of the men would constitute a prohibited wage rate differential if the equal pay provisions otherwise apply.

**§ 1620.17 Jobs requiring equal responsibility in performance.**

(a) *In general.* The equal pay standard applies to jobs the performance of which requires equal responsibility. Responsibility is concerned with the degree of accountability required in the performance of the job, with emphasis on the importance of the job obligation. Differences in the degree of responsibility required in the performance of otherwise equal jobs cover a wide variety of situations. The following illustrations in subsection (b), while by no means exhaustive, may suggest the nature or degree of differences in responsibility which will constitute unequal work.

(b) *Comparing responsibility requirements of jobs.* (1) There are many situations where one employee of a group performing jobs which are equal in other respects is required from time to time to assume supervisory duties for reasons such as the absence of the regular supervisor. Suppose, for instance, that it is the employer's practice to pay a higher wage rate to such a "relief" supervisor with the understanding that during the intervals in which the employee performs supervisory duties the employee is in training for a supervisory position. In such a situation, payment of the higher rate to the employee might well be based solely on the additional responsibility required to perform the job and the equal pay provisions would not require the same rates to be paid to an employee of the opposite sex in the group who does not have an equal responsibility. There would clearly be no question concerning such a wage rate differential if the employer pays the higher rate to both men and women who are called upon from time to time to assume such supervisory responsibilities.

(2) Other differences in responsibilities of employees in generally similar jobs may require similar conclusions. Sales clerks, for example, who are engaged primarily in selling identical or

similar merchandise may be given different responsibilities. Suppose that one employee of such a group (who may be either a man or a woman) is authorized and required to determine whether to accept payment for purchases by personal checks of customers. The person having this authority to accept personal checks may have a considerable, additional degree of responsibility which may materially affect the business operations of the employer. In this situation, payment of a higher wage rate to this employee would be permissible.

(3) On the other hand, there are situations where one employee of the group may be given some minor responsibility which the others do not have (e.g., turning out the lights in his or her department at the end of the business day) but which is not of sufficient consequence or importance to justify a finding of unequal responsibility. As another example of a minor difference in responsibility, suppose that office employees of both sexes work in jobs essentially alike but at certain intervals a male and female employee performing otherwise equal work within the meaning of the statute are responsible for the office payroll. One of these employees may be assigned the job of checking time cards and compiling the payroll list. The other, of the opposite sex, may be required to make out paychecks, or divide up cash and put the proper amounts into pay envelopes after drawing a payroll check. In such circumstances, although some of the employees' duties are occasionally dissimilar, the difference in responsibility involved would not appear to be of a kind that is recognized in wage administration as a significant factor in determining wage rates. Under such circumstances, this difference would seem insufficient to justify a wage rate differential between the man's and woman's job if the equal pay provisions otherwise apply.

**§ 1620.18 Jobs performed under similar working conditions.**

(a) *In general.* In order for the equal pay standard to apply, the jobs are required to be performed under similar working conditions. It should be noted that the EPA adopts the flexible stand-

ard of similarity as a basis for testing this requirement. In determining whether the requirement is met, a practical judgment is required in light of whether the differences in working conditions are the kind customarily taken into consideration in setting wage levels. The mere fact that jobs are in different departments of an establishment will not necessarily mean that the jobs are performed under dissimilar working conditions. This may or may not be the case. The term "similar working conditions" encompasses two subfactors: "surroundings" and "hazards." "Surroundings" measure the elements, such as toxic chemicals or fumes, regularly encountered by a worker, their intensity and their frequency. "Hazards" take into account the physical hazards regularly encountered, their frequency and the severity of injury they can cause. The phrase "working conditions" does not encompass shift differentials.

(b) *Determining similarity of working conditions.* Generally, employees performing jobs requiring equal skill, effort, and responsibility are likely to be performing them under similar working conditions. However, in situations where some employees performing work meeting these standards have working conditions substantially different from those required for the performance of other jobs, the equal pay principle would not apply. On the other hand, slight or inconsequential differences in working conditions which are not usually taken into consideration by employers or in collective bargaining in setting wage rates would not justify a differential in pay.

**§ 1620.19 Equality of wages—application of the principle.**

Equal wages must be paid in the same medium of exchange. In addition, an employer would be prohibited from paying higher hourly rates to all employees of one sex and then attempting to equalize the differential by periodically paying employees of the opposite sex a bonus. Comparison can be made for equal pay purposes between employees employed in equal jobs in the same establishment although they work in different departments.