



United States Office of Personnel Management

Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness

Digest of Significant Classification Decisions and Opinions

June 2000

Article No. 24-04

Standard: Job Family Standard for Professional Physical Science Work,
GS-1300 (October 1997)

Factor: N/A

Issues: Series determination, grade level

Identification of the Classification Issue

This issue arose as a result of OPM's adjudication of a classification appeal. The appellant's hydrologist position required application of the Job Family Standard (JFS) for Professional Physical Science Work, GS-1300. The appellant's position was classified by the agency as Hydrologist, GS-1315-12. He believed his position should be classified as Environmental Scientist, GS-1301-13.

Resolution

The appellant's supervisor estimated that about 40 percent of the appellant's work was in hydrology, about 40 percent in geology, and about 20 percent in chemistry. The appellant believed his position required work in other physical sciences to the extent that his work as a hydrologist could not be considered predominant. OPM found that the primary and paramount field was hydrology because expertise in other fields was not required beyond what was necessary to accomplish the hydrological functions. Further, hydrogeology is a recognized subfield within the hydrology occupation. Hydrogeology covers work whose primary concern is with water but deals with the occurrence and movement of water in the crust of the earth and requires knowledge of geology to obtain appropriate water samples and predict the interactions between water and its geological environment. OPM found the position to be properly classified as Hydrologist, GS-1315.

The appellant directed and oversaw contractors at a Superfund site covering approximately 35 square miles. When problems occurred, the appellant made the necessary modifications in a procedure or, in cooperation with the environmental engineers, the equipment needed to remove contaminants from the water. The appellant gave speeches for the public affairs group to obtain public stakeholder acceptance for the selected procedure. Assignments were performed with considerable latitude. The work did not receive technical review and was generally accepted without change.

Although the appellant performed some aspects of the work illustrated at the GS-13 grade level, the position did not fully meet the intent of the GS-13 grade level criteria. As at the GS-12 grade level, the appellant extensively modified standard procedures or combinations of standard procedures to perform his work. This fell short of GS-13 grade level work involving wide-ranging program issues for which technical problem definitions, methods, and/or data are highly incomplete, controversial, or uncertain. While the appellant performed some contractor oversight and program representation functions, he did not serve as an advisor or consultant for headquarters or field offices, develop new or revised guidelines for departmentwide use, or make public presentations involving long-range and controversial program issues typical of the GS-13 grade level. These functions were vested in other positions in the organization. Consequently, OPM determined that the appellant's work was properly evaluated at the GS-12 grade level.

Link to [C-1315-12-01](#)