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DIGEST OF SIGNIFICANT CLASSIFICATION DECISIONS AND OPINIONS

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Preface

This is the twenty-first issue of the *DIGEST OF SIGNIFICANT CLASSIFICATION DECISIONS AND OPINIONS*. In it we present summaries of several decisions and opinions that we believe have Governmentwide applicability. The General Schedule Supervisory Guide continues to raise significant interpretive issues. In order to provide clarifying guidance that will ensure consistency of interpretation with respect to those issues, we are devoting a significant portion of *Digest* 21 to articles on the General Schedule Supervisory Guide and one on the recently released General Schedule Leader Grade Evaluation Guide. Other articles cover Federal Wage System interpretive issues. The *Digest* is designed to aid classifiers in exercising their judgment; *Digest* items do not supersede or supplement classification standards and do not constitute “case law.”

Suggestions for improving future issues of the *Digest* may be made via email to fedclass_appeals@opm.gov or fax at 202-606-2663, or by writing to the Director, Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs, U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 1900 E Street, NW., Washington, DC 20415-0001. The telephone number is 202-606-2990.

Digest issues are also available on the Office of Personnel Management’s website and electronic bulletin board. The website address is <http://www.opm.gov/classapp> ~~and the electronic bulletin board is OPM ONLINE. Using a modem, dial OPM ONLINE at 202-606-4800. Long distance telephone charges may apply.~~ [OPM ONLINE was discontinued July 1999. The *Digest* can also be found on OPM’s CD-ROM entitled General Schedule Position Classification and Federal Wage System Job Grading Standards, which is issued by OPM’s Classification Programs Division.]

This issue of the *Digest* was edited by Mr. Robert Hendler (Philadelphia Oversight Division). Contributions were provided by Mr. Hendler, Mr. Fred Boland (Chicago Oversight Division), Mr. Robert Gill (formerly with the Atlanta Oversight Division), and Messrs. Delmar White and Winford Hooker (Classification Programs Division).

Jeffrey D. Miller, *Director*
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs

Standard: [General Schedule Supervisory Guide](#)
(April 1998)

Factor: Factor 3

Issue: Coverage of Level 3-3a

Identification of the Classification Issue

This issue arose in an OPM oversight division as a result of a request for advice and assistance. The position directed a small staff conducting a program management function in an organization immediately below the agency level. The work entailed providing program guidance and oversight to operating programs at multiple field installations. The position did not exercise line authority over the lower echelon operating programs. The small staff work load directly supervised primarily performed program policy development work. The issue was whether the position supported Level 3-3a.

Resolution

The GSSG is used to evaluate the supervisory responsibilities of positions and managerial responsibilities that may accompany supervisory responsibilities. Covered positions must exercise both administrative and technical supervision over their subordinate workforce. Exclusion #3 further clarifies this basic coverage requirement in that positions meeting the coverage requirements and graded by using the GSSG may not have positions reporting to them and assigned to different chains of command credited in applying the GSSG, e.g., matrix management positions. This is in agreement with the basic position classification principle that work assignment responsibilities must be identified and credited to specific positions. Thus, supervisory responsibility for a position may not be credited to multiple positions.

The position was covered by the GSSG in that it exercised both administrative and technical supervision over a small staff and met the other two GSSG basic coverage requirements. Based on the supervisory and managerial authorities delegated and exercised, the position met Level 3-2. The position was engaged in some delegated functions and authorities typical of Level 3-3a, e.g., it was closely involved with high level program officials in the development of program goals and objectives. These functions, however, were program management functions. The position was not delegated line supervisory or managerial authority over the field operating units implementing the program goals and objectives. Because they were not in the position's direct chain of command, these "subordinate organizational units" did not reflect the exercise of direct managerial authority found at Level 3-3a. Thus, OPM found that the position was evaluated properly at Level 3-2.

Standard: [General Schedule Supervisory Guide](#)
(April 1998)

Factor: N/A

Issue: Coverage of the GSSG

Identification of the Classification Issue

This issue arose in an OPM oversight division's response to a request for technical guidance. The agency asked whether a position directing the work of two staff years of GS-11 grade level work performed by Federal civilian employees and approximately five staff years of contractor performed work would be covered by the GSSG. The functions performed by the contractor staff was substantially of the same kind and level as the work performed by the Federal employees. The position description of record indicated that the employee spent 10 percent of the work time supervising the two *Federal* employees and approximately 25 percent of the time overseeing contractor performed work.

Resolution

The oversight division found the position was excluded from GSSG coverage. The guide states that to be covered, a position must: (1) administratively and technically direct others; (2) spend at least 25 percent of the work time performing those functions; and, (3) meet at least the lowest level of Factor 3 in the guide based on supervising "Federal civilian employees, military or uniformed service employees, volunteers, or other *noncontractor* personnel." The GSSG also states positions with oversight responsibilities only over the work of private sector contractors are excluded from coverage of the guide and are to be evaluated using the appropriate nonsupervisory standards or guides for the occupations involved.

The guide is intended to measure the difficulty, complexity, and responsibility of work involved in the administrative and technical direction of others through the equivalent of an employer/employee relationship. Covered supervisors are expected to plan, schedule, and direct work operations; evaluate work performance and assure work meets standards of quantity and quality; and exercise other personnel management authorities. Controls over military service, uniformed service, and/or volunteer subordinates may be more limited than for Federal civilian employees, e.g., recommending rather than taking disciplinary action. However, delegated authorities and responsibilities equivalent to the lowest level of Factor 3 typically are exercised over these noncontractor work loads and meet GSSG coverage requirements.

OPM found the level of work performed by the two Federal civilian employees involved the relative freedom from supervision that precluded the position from meeting the threshold required

for coverage, i.e., spending 25 percent of the time technically and administratively supervising noncontractor work. Therefore, the GSSG could not be applied for grade level determination. The oversight division advised the agency that while the GSSG might be applied as the equivalent of a closely related standard for grade confirmation purposes, the position should be evaluated by application of an appropriate subject matter standard containing technical program management grading criteria.

Standard: [General Schedule Supervisory Guide](#)
(April 1998)

Factor: Factor 5, Difficulty of Typical Work
Directed

Issues: Determining Base Level

Identification of the Classification Issue

This issue arose in an OPM oversight division's response to a request for technical guidance. The agency asked whether the GSSG permitted crediting a GS-14 base level. It based the question on the wording in Factors 5 and 6. Factor 5 credits positions "GS-13 or higher, or equivalent" at Level 5-8. Factor 6 provides for crediting "work comparable in difficulty to the GS-13 or higher level" at Level 6-6a. The grades of the GS-14 nonsupervisory administrative positions directed were dependent on the crediting of Level 2-5, and followed the typical factor level pattern for GS-14 administrative work illustrated in *The Classifier's Handbook*.

Resolution

The oversight division found the GS-14 positions could not be used for base level purposes. The GSSG specifically excludes "work that is graded on an extraordinary degree of independence from supervision, or personal research accomplishments" from base level consideration. It does, however, permit adjusting the grades of such work for purposes of applying the guide to those appropriate for performance under "normal" supervision. This requirement continues previously established OPM classification policy that Level 2-5 is limited to administrative direction and, consequently, represents an extraordinary independence or freedom from supervision. Thus, where Level 2-5 is the grade-determining factor for a position, that level cannot be used toward determining the base level of work supervised in applying the GSSG. Similar adjustments must be made when reviewing positions covered by narrative standards for base level purposes.

The stated purpose of the GSSG is to evaluate the demands of overseeing "work through combined technical and administrative direction of others." In contrast, Level 2-5 reflects administrative supervision. Additional support for this interpretation is found within the GSSG itself as noted by the agency. First, Level 5-8 is for "GS-13 or higher, or equivalent." Second, Level 6-6a is for "work comparable in difficulty to the GS-13 or higher level." The wording in both these factors establishes an intended ceiling that meshes with the factor level patterns for both administrative and professional work in *The Classifier's Handbook* in which positions at and above the GS-14 grade level are credited at Level 2-5.

These interpretive concepts parallel those in narrative standards, such as the Research Grants Grade Evaluation Guide (RGGEG). At the GS-14 grade level in the RGGEG, “Supervisory control is primarily administrative.” At the GS-15 grade level, “Supervision. . .is nominal.” In contrast, the classification of positions supervising GS-14 or higher graded positions typically is based on program management and not supervisory responsibilities. Classification of those positions is based on the application of appropriate program management classification standards and not the GSSG.

Standard: [General Schedule Leader Grade Evaluation Guide](#) (April 1998)

Factor: N/A

Issue: Coverage of the GSLGEG

Identification of the Classification Issue

This issue arose in an OPM oversight division's adjudication of an appeal. The appellant occupied a Loan Specialist (General), GS-1165-11, position. The appellant spent approximately 20 percent of her time on administrative functions over a staff of three employees (one Loan Specialist (Realty), GS-1165-9; one Community Development Loan Technician (OA), GS-1101-6; and one Community Development Assistant (OA), GS-1101-5) inclusive of leader duties. The agency determined the appellant's leading three positions "up to and including grade GS-9" required application of the Work Leader Grade-Evaluation Guide (WLGEG), subsequently replaced by Part I of the GSLGEG, resulting in evaluation at the GS-11 grade level, one grade over the highest level of nonsupervisory work led. The issue was whether the GSLGEG should be used to evaluate the position and, if so, how it should be applied.

Resolution

Part I of the GSLGEG is used to classify positions that, as a regular and recurring part of their assignment, lead three or more employees *in accomplishing clerical or other one-grade interval occupations* in the General Schedule. Work leaders also perform nonsupervisory work that usually is of the same kind and level as that done by the group led. Because the appellant led only two covered employees, OPM declined to apply Part I directly to the appealed position or use it for titling purposes. Since leader work occupied less than 25 percent of the appellant's work time, these duties could not be grade controlling. Part II also was not applicable to the appellant's position in that she did not spend 25 percent or more of her time leading GS employees in accomplishing two-grade interval work. Only one of the three subordinate positions would be covered by Part II.

The oversight division found, however, that the grade level worth of the appellant's leader duties merited evaluation to assure all aspects of the position were assessed fully. The record showed that the appellant performs a full range of leader functions, including distributing and balancing work load; assuring work is accomplished timely and correctly; reviewing work, and amending or rejecting work not meeting established standards; identifying training needs and training employees in accordance with established procedures, policies, practices, and regulations; resolving informal complaints; reporting on performance or disciplinary problems; and, providing input on promotions, reassignments, and awards.

Although not directly applicable, Part I provided the most appropriate criteria for evaluating the appellant's leader functions since two of the three subordinate positions would be covered by that portion of the GSLGEG. Part I provides for classifying leader positions one grade over the highest level of nonsupervisory work led, i.e., nonsupervisory one-grade interval work. The GS-1165-9 work, therefore, could not be used as the level of work led. Applying established classification principles and practices, the oversight division found that the level of work led would not exceed a constructed GS-8 grade level and, therefore, the leader functions performed by the appellant would not exceed the GS-9 grade level. An advisory from the Classification Programs Division affirmed this interpretation of the GSLGEG.

Standard: [Job Grading Standard for Supervisors](#)
(WS) (December 1992)

Factor: Factor II, Level of Work Supervised

Issue: Level of Work Supervised for Second Level Supervisors of Mixed Work

Identification of the Classification Issue

The issue arose in an OPM oversight division's adjudication of a job grading appeal. A second level supervisor claimed, even though the majority of his staff was lower graded, the higher grade work carried out in several components of his organization was representative of the work he directed and should be credited as the Level of Work Supervised under Factor II. His organization employed about 46 people engaged in the maintenance and repair of aircraft systems and components. The organization consisted of three sections: Avionics, Accessory, and Propulsion, with each section having its own specialized shops. The staff consisted of about 7 supervisors, 6 small shop chiefs, 3 Grade 13 employees, 6 Grade 12 employees, and 24 Grade 10 employees. When adjusted for excluded work, the end result was that about 20 percent of the organization's work properly included under Factor II, consisting of seven electronics related jobs, was above the Grade 10 level.

Resolution

The Job Grading Standard for Supervisors functions as a pay setting instrument that is intended to establish the proper pay relationship between the supervisory demands of the WS job and the work force led. The Classification Programs Division issued an advisory confirming the following standard interpretation. Factor II of the standard provides for crediting the highest grade level *representative* of the overall work operations supervised. It does not specify a minimum work load percentage for such operations, but cautions against using a single job as the basis for credit. Such caution would be demanded, for example, when grading first level supervisors who direct only a few jobs in the same occupation, any one of which might represent an equally significant portion of a small workforce, but not necessarily the overall difficulty of work operations for which the supervisor is responsible.

The appellant's case, however, concerned work performed by seven higher graded electronics workers. The work was important and critical, but not a significant portion of the overall operations of the 35 included staff years of work. These seven workers performed functions requiring special occupational expertise and operated with a level of skill and independence *atypical* of the overall organization. This difference was reflected in their higher grades, which were exceptional within the overall organization where the highest graded work

typically was Grade 10. Hence, these several jobs could only marginally affect the difficulty and responsibility of the appellant's second level supervisory duties.

Factor II credits the direction of mission related work and excludes other work. The work of seven subordinate supervisors, who spent virtually all their time directing maintenance and repair work versus personally performing that work, was excluded because it was graded based on the supervisory standard. The work of four Grade 12 employees was excluded because they performed the supporting function of calibrating and maintaining test equipment used by the appellant's organization to accomplish its main mission: the repair and maintenance of aircraft. Of the remaining work performed by approximately 35 other employees, that of the 6 small shop chiefs, who devoted a portion of their time to quasi-supervisory duties, was adjusted downward one grade level to properly reflect its nonsupervisory grade worth.

The effect of the several higher graded jobs on the level of work led was further weakened because of the diminished technical review exercised in second and higher level supervisory jobs, particularly in mixed occupation organizations like the appellant's. First level supervisors bear most of the burden of technical supervision, which mitigated the impact the seven higher graded employees' work had on the appellant's job. Even though a second level supervisor has personal knowledge of the highest level work being performed, as in the appellant's case, the second level supervisory job must be evaluated based on the requirements of the total job and not the individual qualifications of the supervisor. Therefore, a first level supervisor credited for technical oversight of an organization's highest graded but smallest function would not automatically get the same credit when promoted to a second level position over the function's umbrella organization. Crediting this marginal portion of work operations, then, as representative of the appellant's overall technical responsibility was deemed inappropriate and would have resulted in a pay disparity unintended by the standard, which does not permit interpolation of its grading criteria and which requires that every aspect of the criteria be fully met because of the richness of the supervisory pay levels.

Standard: [Job Grading Standard for Supervisors](#)
(WS) (December 1992)

Factor: Factor III, Subfactor C, Workforce
Dispersion

Issue: Crediting Workforce Dispersion to Second
Level Supervisors

Identification of the Classification Issue

The issue arose in an Office of Personnel Management oversight division's adjudication of a job grading appeal. A second level supervisor had subordinates working in ten different shops, all located on the same base. Five of the shops were located in the same hangar complex. Others were across the street or a few blocks away. One was located approximately three miles away. Each shop has either a small shop chief, responsible for technical direction of the work, or a first level supervisor. Much of the work in the shops was cyclical in nature, consisting of periodic inspection, maintenance, and repair. Projects generally ran from less than a day in duration to several days for complex repairs.

Resolution

The small shop chiefs and first-line supervisors primarily were responsible for monitoring the performance of work and directly coordinated work between shops. Workforce dispersion imposed additional demands on some of these individuals, but it did not significantly add to the second level supervisor's coordination and monitoring demands. The appellant's job possessed significant coordination demands, but they were already recognized under other factors of the standard. They related to the work operation itself, rather than to workforce dispersion.

The purpose of Subfactor C is to recognize the *additional* demands monitoring and coordinating a geographically dispersed workforce may impose. Under some situations, a dispersed workforce requires continual attention to the available staff, skills, tools, equipment, supplies, and schedule in order to ensure the timely accomplishment of work at multiple sites. The more these factors are subject to change (e.g., when staff or work moves from site to site), the more difficult monitoring and coordinating become and the greater the supervisor's involvement in such activities. Such activities contrast with the long-range planning and priority setting that typically occupy the recurring attention of higher level supervisors regardless of whether or not the workforce is dispersed.

The additional demands that *workforce dispersion* places on a supervisor may require more than simply contributing staff or equipment to various work sites. Workforce dispersion may require the second level supervisor's *personal* attention in determining:

- the work load demands of each site;
- the staff and skills that may be drawn from multiple units without jeopardizing the work accomplishment of the supplying organizations;
- the tools, supplies, equipment, and material that must be available;
- the schedule that will accommodate such requirements; and
- the adjustments necessary to adhere to the schedule.

These additional demands were not present to any significant degree in the second level supervisor's job. Hence, no credit under the subfactor was warranted.

Standards: [Boiler Plant Operator, 5402](#)
[Utility Systems Operator, 5406](#)
[Air Conditioning Equipment Operator, 5415](#)

Factor: N/A

Issue: Crediting of “Operator in charge”

Identification of the Classification Issue

This issue arose in three appeal decisions from two separate OPM oversight divisions and a later reconsideration of one of the initial appeals. The appellants were given or had requested an additional grade credit for functioning as the “operator in charge” on an assigned shift. The same criteria also appear in the job grading standards for Electric Power Controller, 5407; Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator, 5408; Water Treatment Plant Operator, 5409; and Fuel Distribution System Operator, 5413.

Resolution

The job grading standards describe five specific conditions under which one additional grade may be credited for responsibility as “operator in charge.” The standards state that only those positions which clearly meet the conditions may be granted the additional grade credit. The Classification Programs Division issued an advisory opinion confirming that the conditions defined in the standards represent the minimum requirement and that all the requirements must be clearly met before the additional grade credit can be awarded. Those conditions, and the OPM decision on each condition, are:

1. The operator at the full performance level must be assigned shift responsibility on a regular and recurring basis. Only one operator on a shift can be assigned this responsibility.

OPM found that this condition could be met if the operator worked alone on a shift on a regular and recurring basis for the systems involved. However, at one location, both utility systems operators and air conditioning equipment operators were given the additional grade credit although the agency recognized that the utility systems operator controlled the air conditioning equipment by remote monitoring equipment. In that situation, only the utility systems operator could be given the additional grade credit.

2. The operator follows written instructions supplied by the supervisor or by the “operator in charge” on the previous shift.

OPM found that this condition was met when the operators received written and oral instructions and operating information from the supervisor or the operator on the previous shift.

3. The “operator in charge” typically performs duties which are more responsible and require a slightly higher level of skill and knowledge than the full performance level operators who are on duty where a supervisor is available. This includes a thorough knowledge of the entire utility system and the user requirements to locate problems and initiate immediate corrective action.

OPM found that this condition could be met when the operator was required to possess knowledge of the entire utility systems of the facility (e.g., heating, air conditioning, electrical distribution, water, and sewer systems) and was required to apply this knowledge in locating problems in those systems in the absence of a supervisor. In requesting reconsideration of one of the appeal decisions, the agency argued that responsibility to respond to “after hours” problems within the facility to make minor repairs or notify appropriate personnel was sufficient to meet this condition. Examples of this work included resetting tripped circuit breakers and unplugging stopped commodes. However, OPM determined that this condition covered only the operation of the utility systems and did not cover collateral responsibility for other equipment within the facility on an irregular basis, especially when the work performed was typically lower graded work.

OPM found some confusion about whether the terms “full performance level” and “journey level” were synonymous. They are not. The term “full performance level” as used in this context refers to the highest level of work performed at a facility above the worker or intermediate level. The term “journey level” as used in the trades and craft occupations denotes an experienced worker capable of independent performance and does not necessarily equate to the term “full performance level.” For example, Grade 10 and Grade 11 are both journey levels in the Electronics Mechanic, 2604 occupation. Depending on the work performed in an activity, either of these levels could be the full performance level for that activity.

4. In the absence of written contingency procedures, the “operator in charge” has responsibility to decide whether to shut down the operation or attempt to bypass problems until corrective action has been completed if the equipment still in operation can handle the load.

OPM found that most utility plants have written operating procedures available to guide the operator. These procedures may specify the circumstances under which the operator will shut down equipment, thereby limiting the discretion of the operator. In one of the appealed cases, OPM found that the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations required that written contingency plans be in place for all utility systems and equipment, which precluded the appealed positions from meeting this condition.

In one appeal, the employee operated a system with a single boiler. The decisions available were limited to determining whether the system should be brought down. If that action had to be taken, the building affected was closed. OPM found the situation fell short of the intent of the standard which requires deciding whether to shut down a boiler and, if so, whether to fire up another boiler and attempt to bypass the trouble until corrective action is completed.

5. Typically, the “operator in charge” has responsibility to determine what work must be done and has the authority to approve overtime or call in necessary maintenance personnel. The operator is responsible for relaying instructions to the next shift operator including problems encountered and actions taken.

OPM found that this condition also related only to the utility systems in the facility and did not relate to any collateral responsibility for “after hours” emergency repairs to other equipment (see the discussion under item 3 above). The operator must have the authority to determine the scope of work to be accomplished and to either approve overtime for personnel already on site or recall personnel to perform the work without obtaining approval of a supervisor. In one of the appeal cases, OPM found that recall of employees was the responsibility of an “administrative officer of the day” at the facility and not within the authority of the position designated as “operator in charge.” In the other appeal case, OPM found that the supervisor was notified by telephone of all significant problems, including those necessitating the recall of employees. These situations preclude crediting this condition.

The guidance in the job grading standards indicates that additional grade credit for “operator in charge” should not be granted routinely but should be reserved for those situations where the conditions set forth in the job grading standards are clearly met.

Standard: [Job Grading Standard for Inspectors](#)

Factor: N/A

Issue: Coverage of the Standard

Identification of the Classification Issue

This issue arose in an OPM oversight division's adjudication of a group appeal. The appellants occupied Videotape Inspector, 3901, jobs at an activity providing film and videotape storage, distribution, and related support services. The major functions of the job were (1) maintaining the electronic and related equipment in the activity, including repair and overhaul; (2) dubbing tapes and films from masters provided by external organizations; and, (3) inspecting videotapes and films provided by external organizations against established industry standards. Inspection was for the purpose of accepting or rejecting the final product. The tapes and films inspected included master tapes subsequently used by the appellants for dubbing as well as production run tapes dubbed by contractors.

The appellants believed that their job was covered by the General Schedule and was classified properly to the Quality Assurance Series, GS-1910, based on their inspection work. They opined that their inspection was of the film content, i.e., the quality of audio and visual effects and, therefore, reflected the analytical functions found in the GS-1910 series.

Resolution

The oversight division found that the primary and paramount skill for performing the work was allocated properly to the Federal Wage System (FWS). The skills and knowledges recruited for by the organization in filling the job were covered by the Electronics Mechanic, 2604, occupation. Employees in 2604 jobs in the host activity served as the recruitment source. All the appellants had received training in their inspection functions subsequent to their selection for their jobs.

The division found that the inspection work performed was not FWS in nature. The FWS Job Grading Standard (JGS) for Inspectors is used to grade jobs that involve examining the services, materials, and products of trade or craft workers to determine that the physical and operating characteristics are within acceptable standards, specifications, or contractual requirements. Inherent in such inspection work is the exercise of paramount trade, craft, or laboring skills and knowledge in order to perform the inspection process. The JGS for Inspectors provides a means to establish an appropriate pay relationship between the trade, craft, or laboring work performed and the difficulty and responsibility of the inspection

function. The intent of the JGS, as reflected in Part II, Examples of Job Descriptions, is to measure the demands of inspection as they relate to correcting actual trades and crafts work processes that do not meet the standards of the trade or craft.

The appellants' work did not require skill and knowledge of videotape and film production, i.e., the skills and knowledges used to record, edit, and otherwise manipulate sound and visual images. Tape and film inspection was limited to performing processes similar to exclusion #4 in the JGS, i.e., inspection limited to the acceptability of the product for contractual requirements not requiring the exercise of trade, craft, or laboring skills as the paramount requirements. The work also did not entail the application of quality assurance principles and techniques; it was product inspection work specifically excluded from the GS-1910 series.

Because the inspection work was not FWS in nature, it could not be considered in the classification of the job based on the principle that only work in the controlling pay category can be considered in the evaluation of a job. The oversight division found that the tape dubbing work performed did not exceed the Grade 7 level by application of the Offset Photographer, 4414, JGS. The electronics mechanic work performed did not fully meet the Grade 11 level in the 2604 JGS. It consisted of servicing limited portions of a "television studio" and, thus, was evaluated properly at the Grade 10 level. An advisory opinion from the Classification Programs Division concurred with this analysis. OPM concluded the job was graded properly as Electronics Mechanic, 2604-10.

Standards: [Pest Controller, 5026](#), and
[Industrial Controls Mechanic, 2606](#), and
[Electronics Mechanic, 2604](#)

Factor: N/A

Issue: Cross Application of Related Job Grading Standards (JGS's)

Identification of the Classification Issue

The issue arose in an OPM oversight division's adjudication of two job grading appeals. The first appeal was from a Gardener, 5003, who performed a range of gardening and related duties, including the application of pesticides to control plant pests and diseases. He claimed that possession of a state Class 3 license for applying pesticides and his exposure to the dangers of pesticides, which necessitated his use of protective clothing and devices, exceeded the Grade 8 level, the highest level described in the 5003 job grading standard. The second appeal was from a Utility Systems Repairer-Operator, 4742, who claimed the Electronic Industrial Control Mechanic, 2606, job grading standard (JGS) should be applied to evaluate his central environmental monitoring and control system (ECMS) duties.

Resolution

The oversight division found that the application of pesticides was typical of work in the Gardener, 5003, occupation, and was directly addressed in the 5003 JGS at the Grade 6 level, i.e., "selects and uses fungicides, insecticides, and herbicides for the control of common plant diseases, plant insects, and weeds" and "is usually exposed to chemical sprays and dusts more frequently than at the lower grades." After consultation with OPM central office, the oversight division also applied the 5026 JGS to the appealed job. The 5026 JGS, revised in 1987, contains more detailed information regarding the application of general use and restricted pesticides than the 5003 which was published in 1971. This technical information must be considered in order to assure that pesticide related gardening duties are fairly and accurately evaluated by the application of the most current Federal Wage System (FWS) grading criteria.

The appellant applied general insecticides, fungicides, and herbicides to a limited range of native plants and lawn areas at the activity. The work was limited to outdoor application. The appellant was not responsible for or permitted to apply pesticides in buildings. The oversight division found that the 5026 work performed did not meet the Grade 7 level, which is the lowest level described in the JGS. At the Grade 7 level, pest controllers deal with plant pests

and common household, structural, and nuisance pests, such as ants, mosquitos, cockroaches, rats, and mice. They employ commonly used insecticides, herbicides, rodenticides, and fungicides and weigh, measure, and mix pesticide emulsions and baits. The appellant dealt with more limited numbers and types of pesticides in controlling outdoor plant diseases and pests. Because the job did not deal with the range of pest control problems and, thus, did not entail application of the full range of skill, knowledges, and responsibility envisioned at the Grade 7 level, the oversight division determined that the 5026 work performed did not exceed the Grade 6 level.

In the second appeal, OPM found that because the installation did not have an EMCS service contract, the appellant performed occasional ECMS repair work. However, the percentage of such work performed, i.e., less than 10 percent, was not a large enough percentage of the work time to constitute grade controlling work within the meaning of the Federal Wage System (FWS), as discussed in previous *Digest* guidance. OPM found the kind of repair work was not typical of Grade 11 work. As in the first appeal, JGS's must be read in concert with one another to be understood and applied correctly. The recently released Electronics Mechanic, 2604, job grading standard, provided a detailed definition of Grade 11 work in the electronics group that had to be read in conjunction with the 2606 JGS:

In comparison with grade 10 mechanics who service functionally independent components of moderate complexity or a system of limited complexity, grade 11 electronics mechanics install, modify, overhaul, maintain, troubleshoot, and repair complex electronics equipment and a complete operational system(s) consisting of numerous complex integral components which require a wide range of electronics principles and practices. . . . Grade 11 electronics mechanics apply a comprehensive knowledge of operating electronics principles such as circuit elements, digital logic, microprocessors, core memory, interface circuits, digital data transmission, microwaves, antennas, signal behavior amplification and display.

OPM found the range of repairs performed on the ECMS and the range of skills and knowledge to perform those repairs were more circumscribed than envisioned at the Grade 11 level. These repairs were limited to occasionally replacing circuit boards and microchips and did not routinely require the use of microsoldering or more advanced repair techniques. OPM found, therefore, that had the 2606 JGS been appropriate to use for grading purposes, it would not have yielded the Grade 11 level requested by the appellant.