

U.S. Office of Personnel Management  
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness  
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs

Chicago Oversight Division  
230 S. Dearborn Street, DPN 30-6  
Chicago, IL 60604-1687

**Job Grading Appeal Decision**  
**Under section 5346 of title 5, United States Code**

**Appellant:** [Name]

**Agency classification:** Electrician  
WG-2805-10

**Organization:** [Name] Shop  
[Name] Section  
[Name] Services  
[Name] Medical Center  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
[City, State]

**OPM decision:** Telecommunications Mechanic  
WG-2502-10

**OPM decision number:** C-2502-10-01

/s/ (Ricardo Sims)

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Ricardo Sims  
Operations Supervisor

February 8, 2002

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Date

As provided in section S7-8 of the *Operating Manual: Federal Wage System*, this decision constitutes a certificate that is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the government. There is no right of further appeal. This decision is subject to discretionary review only under conditions and time limits specified in section 532.705(f) of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (address provided in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*, appendix 4, section H).

Since this decision changes the classification of the appealed position, it is to be effective no later than the beginning of the first pay period that begins after the 60th day from the date the appellant filed an appeal with the agency [5 CFR 532.705(d)]. The servicing personnel office must submit a compliance report containing the corrected job description and a Standard Form 50 showing the personnel action taken. The report must be submitted within 30 days from the date of this decision.

**Decision sent to:**

**Appellant:**

[appellant's name and address]

**Agency:**

[name and address of appellant's  
servicing personnel office]

Ms. Ventris C. Gibson  
Deputy Assistant Secretary for  
Human Resources Management (05)  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW Room 206  
Washington, DC 20420

## **Introduction**

The appellant, [Name], is employed with the [Name] Shop, [Name] Section, [Name] Services at the [Name] VA Medical Center (VAMC) in [City, State]. He is employed as an Electrician, WG-2805-10, and believes that his position should be classified as Electrician, WG-2805-11. He believes that neither the servicing human resources office nor the Department of Veterans Affairs appellate authority considered certain aspects of his position in classifying his position. The agency appeal decision was received by the appellant on June 28, 2001, and on July 11, 2001, he appealed that decision to the Chicago Oversight Division of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). We accepted his appeal and will adjudicate it in accordance with section 5112 of title 5, United States Code. We requested additional information from the agency, and received the agency administrative report on August 13, 2001. During the course of our fact-gathering, we interviewed the appellant and the two supervisors immediately above him in the chain of command. We also contacted the OPM office responsible for writing the job grading standards for clarification of the standards intent.

## **General Issues**

In his appeal to the OPM and in his telephone interview with the Classification Appeals Officer (CAO), the appellant mentioned that his job description included almost all of the key phrases described at the WG-11 level in the Electrician Series WG-2805 job grading standard (JGS), and he believes that his job should have been classified at the WG-11 level on this basis. A position description should be a reflection of the duties and responsibilities required by management and actually performed by the position incumbent. We evaluate the duties and responsibilities required by management and performed by the employee, and the skill and knowledge, responsibility, etc., associated with those duties.

The appellant also feels that the agency evaluation of his position did not adequately consider his exposure to carcinogens, radiation, chemicals and extremely high noise levels. We address his concerns in a later section of this evaluation. If the appellant feels that his concerns are not adequately addressed we recommend that he request that his agency consider environmental differential pay.

## **Job Information**

According to the function chart provided, the [Name] Shop where the appellant is assigned “is responsible for the inspection, operation, maintenance, and repair of [the] electrical distribution system, the emergency power system, the fire alarm system, and a variety of electrical equipment at the facility assuring compliance with the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organization (JCAHO) Environment of Care Standards, Code Requirements, and VA Regulations.” The appellant is one of seven electricians employed in the [Name] Shop to perform the work associated with this function. Approximately 80 percent of his work time is devoted to duties associated with the facility fire alarm system, its component equipment, and attached devices. Although the appellant’s supervisor expects that the amount of time he devotes to the fire alarm system will diminish in the future, he still expects it to comprise a majority of the appellant’s time.

The fire alarm system is a computerized, digital system that can be characterized as state-of-the-art for a medical facility such as where the appellant works. It is comprised of a Pyrotronic brand MXL system which is described as a computer processing unit, a large central switch, and about 1350 attached fire alarm devices. There is a major analog switching device through which all the devices are connected via trunk lines, cables and communications lines. The devices are connected via the switch to the central computer which electronically controls them. How the system and its components react to a given stimuli such as smoke or a fire is controlled by another computer system called a CXL. The fire alarm devices include fire alarms, smoke detectors, fire doors, water sprinklers, fans, blowers, vents, dampers, etc., located throughout the VAMC facility buildings.

The appellant is a manufacturer-trained specialist in all aspects of the fire alarm system to include installation, operation, maintenance and programming. He was the on-hand representative of the VAMC when the equipment was originally installed, and he is responsible for the installation of new system software and hardware and associated equipment items and manufacturer's system updates/upgrades. He ensures operation of the overall system and components and conducts tests periodically as directed by applicable guidance to ensure operability. He is the only fire alarm system maintenance person at the facility. In this capacity he troubleshoots and personally repairs malfunctions, and acquires and manages contract maintenance support when the work is too much or it is work for which he is not trained. He programs the MXL and CXL computers to instruct them in how to respond to a given set of criteria. He maintains a stock of common repair parts, and maintains both manual and automated records of the operation and maintenance and repairs performed on the system.

Prior to the installation of the fire alarm system, the appellant worked on the VAMC's old fire alarm system, automatic doors, generators, security parking system, and other electrical systems. When he is not engaged with the fire alarm system, approximately 20 percent of the time, he works in other areas in the electrical and electronics arena. This work is likely to increase in the future, but is not expected by management to constitute a majority of the appellant's time.

### **Series Determination**

Prior to the installation of the new fire alarm system the incumbent was performing work that the agency classified to the Electrician Series, WG-2805. However, since the installation of the new fire alarm system he spends the majority of his time working on the fire alarm system's two central processing units, the central switch, the system wiring, and attached/connected equipment and fire alarm devices. The WG-2805 job grading standard (JGS) in its "Note to Users" acknowledges that the occupation has and is changing as electromechanical devices, controls and equipment are more often giving way to digital devices with solid state circuitry requiring a basic understanding of electronic technology, circuitry and controls. It further states that positions properly assigned to the 2805 series are not typically assigned the responsibility for repairing the boards or other electrical devices, and do not require the depth of knowledge or level of skill found in positions coded to the Electronic Equipment Installation and Maintenance Family, 2600. The incumbent's assignments include responsibility for testing and repairing electrical devices such as electric-powered firewall doors, blowers, fire alarms, smoke detectors, and the switch connecting these devices and the CPUs. Responsibilities also include upgrades, testing,

maintenance and repair of the CPUs. Although some of this work is included in the Electrician Series, WG-2805, the majority of work and the most complex assignments are not covered by this series.

A review of the WG-2502 JGS shows that this series is the appropriate series to assign to the appellant's position. The 2502 series was previously entitled Telephone Mechanic and was used to classify jobs involved in installing, modifying, repairing, and maintaining electromagnetic telephone systems. Recognizing that the environment of digital communications has changed the nature of not only telephone systems but other systems as well, OPM has re-written the standard to acknowledge these changes. The Telecommunications Mechanic Series, WG-2502 now covers jobs involved in installing, modifying, troubleshooting, repairing, and maintaining voice or nonvoice communication systems including central office, local area network systems, wire carrier equipment, communication cable, alarm systems, intercom and public address systems. A contact with the OPM standards writers confirmed that this new JGS is intended to include work involved with fire alarm systems if such systems are controlled centrally, have a CPU and a major switch, and have a number of lines or addresses that are controlled.

We determined that the VAMC's fire alarm system meets the telecommunications system described in the 2502 series, and the appellant's position is covered by this JGS. The proper title for nonsupervisory positions in this series is Telecommunications Mechanic.

### **Grade Determination**

The grade determining criteria in the Telecommunications Mechanic Series, WG-2502 is expressed in terms of four factors, each of which is addressed below.

#### *Skill and Knowledge*

WG-10 Telecommunications Mechanics install, remove, maintain, modify, troubleshoot, and repair voice and/or nonvoice communications systems including alarm systems, and terminal and communications equipment including modems, multiplexers, fiber-optic end equipment, and line drivers. They independently survey the installation area to determine work methods, tools and materials required to accomplish the project. They install and terminate copper core and/or fiber optic house cables. They run cables, key cables or house wire to all terminal connectors, lugs, pins or screws associated with terminating equipment for nonvoice circuits. They install equipment such as backboards, relay racks, central processor unit, trunk cards, line cards, and station cards to provide the desired number of lines and stations. They conduct operational tests of completed installations of all stations.

At the WG-10 level, mechanics apply a working knowledge of the characteristics and principles of AC and DC current and electronics to troubleshoot and repair electronic and electromechanical key and private branch automatic exchange (PBAX) systems and telephones, data circuitry components, and other related equipment and systems. They apply a thorough knowledge of different electronic and solid state data systems including their capabilities, functions of their major circuits, and the associated cables and wiring used to interconnect the systems. They apply knowledge of office automation software by using prepared data bases to

program desired telephone features into electronic key and PBAX systems. WG-10 mechanics are skilled in installing, removing, maintaining, troubleshooting, and repairing electronic and electromechanical telephone systems, PBAXs, telephones, interface/ancillary equipment such as modems, line drivers, patch panels, station carrier units, line couplers for speed dialers, voice recorders, telefax machines, and local wire and cable in support of voice and nonvoice networks for computers, data, and alarm circuits.

By comparison, WG-11 mechanics install, test, troubleshoot, program, maintain, and repair digital switching equipment, attendant consoles, power and ringing relay racks, miscellaneous telephone, radio, fire alarms, intrusion alarms, and computer data circuits and related apparatus required in the central switching office. They analyze system failures and other unusual system occurrences to isolate the source of the problem and determine the cause, and perform scheduled preventive maintenance on the switching system components, subcomponents, peripheral, and other associated equipment. They make cable and pair assignments, and make proper cross connections on the main distribution frame using electric soldering irons and wire wrap guns. In some situations they maintain manual and/or computerized central office records, including detail records, traffic analysis records, cable records, line records, and spare parts inventories.

WG-11 mechanics apply a comprehensive knowledge of telecommunications principles such as switching, traffic, signaling, outside plant and networking and a knowledge of the operational characteristics, capabilities, and limitations of electronic telecommunications equipment and systems to diagnose problems and determine corrective action. They have a working knowledge of digital switch subsystems such as the central processing unit (CPU), disk drives, time-division-multiplex (TDM) switching matrices, trunk and line circuit packs for analog and digital ports, signaling converters, digital announcers, and long distance recorders. They apply a working knowledge of the central office's automated tables/files to retrieve maintenance information, directory assignments, call routes, trunk assignments, equipment features, and equipment interface conditions. They have a working knowledge of terminal equipment including digital telephones, synchronous and asynchronous data modules, modems, protocol converters, and interface equipment to data networks. They utilize a wide variety of test equipment to perform test procedures on lines, incoming trunks, outgoing trunks, central controller (CPU), input/output devices, networks, peripheral modules, link junctures, attendant consoles, channel bank equipment and T-1 span repeater units. They are skilled in loading, programming, manipulating, and retrieving data from dual-processor controlled voice and nonvoice switching systems.

The appellant's position compares favorably to the WG-10 level, but does not fully meet the intent of the WG-11 level in the standard. Similar to the WG-11 level, the appellant oversees overall system operation, maintenance and repair through the MXL and CXL central processing units. His installation, testing, troubleshooting, programming, maintaining and repairing work is performed on the CPUs, the digital switching equipment, power and relay racks, the fire alarm and devices, and related equipment.

While the appellant applies a good knowledge of telecommunications principles, they are not as comprehensive as discussed at the WG-11 level. At the WG-11 level mechanics apply a comprehensive knowledge of telecommunications principles such as switching, traffic, signaling,

outside plant and networking. To be credited at this level, positions must regularly use knowledge of the operations, capabilities, and limitations of digital electronic telecommunications equipment and systems to diagnose problems and determine corrective actions.

In deciding whether the appellant's position is properly graded at the WG-10 or WG-11 level, we contacted the analyst who wrote the standard to clarify the standards intent at that level. While WG-10 mechanics install, troubleshoot, program, maintain, and repair voice and/or nonvoice communications systems outside the central switching office, WG-11 mechanics install, test, troubleshoot, program, maintain, and repair digital switching equipment, etc., and computer data circuits and related apparatus required in the central switching office. We asked the appellant what he does in the case of major problems or malfunctions. He explained that the majority of repairs he makes on the central switch and its immediate associated equipment consists of diagnosing the malfunction and changing the module that has failed. The appellant makes repairs on the switching system that can be made by replacing items rather than repairing them. Although no such problems have occurred yet, we asked what he would do if more complicated problems occurred. He told us that he makes those repairs for which he has been trained by the manufacturer. More complicated problems would be repaired by a firm contracted to come in to make those types of repairs. The skill and knowledge utilized by the appellant do not fully meet the WG-11 level; therefore, the WG-10 level is credited.

### *Responsibility*

WG-10 mechanics receive work assignments from the supervisor in the form of work orders or on a project basis. They independently determine the work sequences, tools, and materials required. They follow or refer to layout sheets, building plans, floor plans, circuits schematics, and manufacturers technical guidance. Completed work may be subject to spot checks by the supervisor, but is usually checked by the operational efficiency of the system repaired and/or installed. The supervisor provides technical advice or assistance on unusual or very difficult problems.

At the WG-11 level, mechanics receive assignments from the supervisor in the form of work orders and from user complaint calls. They independently identify and initiate additional work to overcome problems observed during operation of the inside equipment. They plan and accomplish work using experience and judgment to interpret technical manuals, schematics, wiring diagrams, and flow charts. Completed work is reviewed for overall system operational efficiency, and spot checked for customer satisfaction and general review of resolved problems. The supervisor is available to provide technical assistance on unusual or very difficult problems.

Per the Introduction to the Federal Wage System Job Grading System, under the job grading method used, the grade of a job is decided by comparison of the whole job with grade definitions in the appropriate job grading standard, considering job facts as indicated by the factor.

The appellant's position contains elements of the WG-11 level for this factor. According to the supervisor, anything to do with the fire alarm system is assigned to him. He conducts tests on the system and its devices as required or at his own discretion. He independently determines

what needs to be done and how to do it. He plans and accomplishes his work based upon his specialized training on the fire alarm system and his extensive experience and judgment. He interprets and applies the guidance in the manufacturer's technical manuals and operating instructions, schematics, wiring diagrams, and flow charts. The appellant's completed work is reviewed for overall system operational efficiency and may be spot checked for customer satisfaction. The work is not technically reviewed because neither the appellant's supervisor or the VAMC's operating engineer are technically qualified to work on the fire alarm system. However, our review determined that although there may not be anyone at the VAMC that is technically certified to review the work of the appellant, the contractor is available for unusually complex instructions. This fact mitigates the assignment of the WG-11 level for this factor.

#### *Physical Effort*

The physical effort is similar at the WG-8 through WG-11 levels.

#### *Working Conditions*

As with the preceding factor, working conditions are similar at the WG-8 through WG-11 levels, and the appellant's position fully meets this. In addition, he is exposed to the potential harmful effects of chemicals, carcinogens, and radiation in performing work in those areas of the VAMC which use these in research and/or treatment. This factor, however, does not exceed the WG-11 level.

#### **Final Classification**

The appellant's position is a mix of characteristics of both the WG-10 and WG-11 levels. The skill and knowledge do not fully meet the WG-11 level of the standard. The responsibility he exercises is also a mix. Although the appellant works with an unusual degree of individual responsibility, the overall position cannot be credited at WG-11. In order to be classifiable at the WG-11 level, both the skill and knowledge and level of responsibility are required to be credited at the WG-11 level. The classification of the position is determined to be Telecommunications Mechanic, WG-2502-10.