

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

Dallas Oversight Division
1100 Commerce Street, Room 4C22
Dallas, TX 75242-9968

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

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Agency classification: Boiler Plant Operator
WG-5402-9

Organization: [appellant's activity]
Department of Veterans Affairs
[geographic location]

OPM decision: Boiler Plant Operator
WG-5402-9

OPM decision number: C-5402-09-03

/s/ Bonnie J. Brandon

Bonnie J. Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

June 23, 2000

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).

Decision sent to:

Appellant:

[appellant's name and address]

Agency:

[appellant's personnel office]

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human
Resources Management
Department of Veterans Affairs
Washington, DC 20420

Introduction

On March 30, 2000, the Dallas Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a job grading appeal from [the appellant]. The appellant's job is currently evaluated as Boiler Plant Operator, WG-5402-9. His job is located in the [appellant's activity], Department of Veterans Affairs, at [geographic location]. His appeal has been accepted as timely and decided under section 5346 of title 5, United States Code.

The appellant believes that three of his duties and responsibilities are not adequately evaluated. More specifically, he states that he works with two types of boiler fuels, performs chemical tests and adds chemicals to the boiler water, and has boiler plant shift responsibility on his assigned shifts. Each of these duties is discussed and evaluated under the appropriate section headings of this decision.

In reaching our decision, we carefully reviewed the job description of record and other information provided by the appellant and his agency. We also telephoned the appellant and his immediate supervisor on April 25, 2000, and thoroughly discussed the job.

Job information

The primary purpose of the appellant's job is to personally start, stop, operate, and perform operational maintenance on the medical facility's three large boilers. The appellant operates and maintains all equipment related to steam generation, i.e., feed water pumps, condensate pumps, turbine motor, fuel oil service pumps, air compressors, dryers, condensate return tank, chemical feed pumps, and the like. As one of the facility's six boiler plant operators, the appellant is responsible for boiler plant operation on the evening and night shifts as well as the weekend day shifts. Boiler plant operator work occupies about 65 percent of the appellant's time.

When not assigned to the boiler plant, the appellant assists journey level plumbers on the day shift (about 20 percent of time). He does water utility work, i.e., chemically testing and treating the facility's water utility system (about 10 percent of time). He spends the remaining 5 percent of his time completing miscellaneous maintenance and repair tasks, i.e., maintaining and repairing pumps, motors, blowers, fans, and piping.

Occupation, title, and standard determination

As previously indicated, the primary purpose of the appellant's job is to personally operate and perform operational maintenance work on the three power plant boilers that are used to produce steam that heats and provides hot water for the laundry, hospital, and housing areas. This kind of work is appropriately included in the Federal Wage System (FWS) Job Grading Standard (JGS) for Boiler Plant Operator, WG-5402.

The plumbing assistance work done by the appellant is properly evaluated by application of the FWS JGS for Plumber, WG-4206. The water utility work performed by the appellant is properly evaluated by application of the FWS JGS for Water Treatment Plant Operator, WG-5409. As explained under "Grade Determination," neither the plumbing work nor the water treatment

work the appellant performs meets or exceeds the grade level of the appellant's boiler plant operator work. Since the nonsupervisory boiler plant operator work represents the paramount skill requirement and the highest level of work required, the appellant's job is properly titled and coded as Boiler Plant Operator, WG-5402.

Grade determination

The WG-5402 JGS is used for grading nonsupervisory jobs concerned primarily with the operation and operational maintenance of single and multiple fuel water or fire tube boilers and associated auxiliary and pollution control equipment. These boilers operate at various pressures and temperatures in automatic or manual mode to produce steam or high temperature hot water for the facility. The JGS uses four factors for grade determination, i.e., skill and knowledge, responsibility, physical effort, and working conditions. Physical demands and working conditions are similarly credited at all levels in this JGS. Our assessment of each factor follows.

Skill and knowledge

The appellant's job exceeds the skill and knowledge described at grade 8 since the appellant does not *assist* boiler plant operators but *independently* operates, adjusts, stops, and maintains multiple fuel power boilers. The appellant's work does not fully reach grade 10. At grade 10, boiler plant employees operate auxiliary and pollution control equipment such as electrical or steam driven pumps, forced and induced draft fans, air compressors, deaerating equipment, feed water heaters, coal pulverizers, automatic stokers, economizers, fuel heaters and delivery equipment, demineralizing systems, electrostatic precipitators, and lime slurry systems.

Boiler plant operator work at grade 10 requires the skill and knowledge to adjust fuel feeds and the volume and velocity of draft and other firebox variables to achieve maximum combustion efficiency. Grade-10 boiler plant operators apply a thorough knowledge of chemical and physical aspects of sulfur-containing fuels (e.g., oil, coal, and lignite), the chemical reactions involved in combustion, and the relationship between fuel quality and combustion efficiency.

At grade 10, boiler plant operators apply a full knowledge of steam distribution systems, user requirements, casualty control procedures, and how to bypass a section of the system to maintain service. Operators at this level apply skill in operating boilers from cold starts through normal operation and hot or emergency shutdowns. Grade 10 boiler plant operators apply skill in stabilizing boilers in a closed system when one boiler starts to go down while maintaining safe levels and efficient combustion.

Grade 10 boiler plant operators operate multiple fuel boilers **and** their associated pollution control equipment. Although our fact-finding revealed that both natural gas and diesel oil were used to fuel the facility's boilers, the appellant does not operate or perform operational maintenance or repair of the complex pollution control equipment anticipated at grade 10. Consequently, the full range of skill and knowledge to deal with the demanding pollution control requirements found at grade 10 is not present in the appellant's job. Since the appellant's boiler plant work does not fully meet grade 10 but substantially exceeds the grade 8 described in the JGS, grade 9 is credited.

Responsibility

At grade 10, boiler plant operators work within established instructions that may include special facility procedures to be followed during emergencies, equipment failure, or system malfunction. They are familiar with the total plant layout, including drawings and circuit diagrams of the boilers and auxiliary and pollution control equipment, in order to locate problems and determine appropriate action necessary to maintain adequate steam or hot water production. Predetermined methods and procedures are typically found at grade 8. Grade 10 boiler plant operators, however, make more independent decisions and judgments (e.g., pollution and combustion control adjustments, troubleshooting techniques, equipment maintenance and repair) and take immediate action to prevent interruptions of plant operations and report emergencies or dangerous conditions. Technical assistance on difficult or unusual problems is usually available from the supervisor or a higher-grade employee. The supervisor of grade 10 boiler plant operators occasionally observes operational efficiency, production reports, and adherence to established operating techniques and procedures.

While the appellant is responsible for monitoring and dealing with the complete boiler plant operations, the system that he operates does not have the pollution control equipment and the attendant decision-making requirements anticipated at grade 10. Since the appellant's boiler plant operator responsibility exceeds grade 8 but does not fully meet grade 10, grade 9 is properly credited.

Physical effort

The appellant's physical effort is typical of that anticipated at grade 8 and grade 10 where boiler plant workers frequently work in confined areas in and around boilers and support equipment (i.e., auxiliary control equipment). The work requires moderate to strenuous effort and long periods of walking, standing, climbing, bending, and crouching. Boiler plant operators frequently lift and carry boiler parts and chemical supplies weighing up to 40 pounds unassisted. Occasionally, they lift and carry items weighing over 40 pounds with assistance of other workers. Since physical effort is the same at grade 8 and 10, this factor has no significant impact on the overall grade level worth of the job.

Working conditions

The appellant's working conditions are typical of the grade 8 and grade 10 boiler plant workers who work indoors and occasionally work outside for short periods of time where they are subject to prevailing weather conditions. Like workers at these grade levels, the appellant is exposed to high temperatures, constant noise, rotating machinery, soot, dirt, grease, chemicals, oil, and fumes in the work area. In addition to working on catwalks, the appellant is subject to cuts and abrasions from the use of tools and equipment and burns from acids, caustics, hot water, steam, and contact with piping and boilers. Since working conditions are the same at grade 8 and grade 10, this factor has no significant impact on the overall grade of the appellant's job.

Summary

Since the *Skill and knowledge* and *Responsibility* factors exceed grade 8 but do not fully meet grade 10, the boiler plant operator work is properly evaluated at grade 9.

The appellant believes that his boiler plant shift responsibility warrants additional grade credit. In order to receive additional grade credit for “operator in charge” responsibilities, the appellant’s job must clearly meet five responsibilities.

1. The operator must be working at the full performance level and must be assigned shift responsibility on a regular and recurring basis. Only one operator on a shift can be assigned this responsibility.
2. The operator follows written instructions supplied by the supervisor or by the “operator in charge” on the previous shift.
3. The “operator in charge” typically performs duties that 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.
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.
5. 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.

The appellant’s job meets conditions 1, 2, and 5. He is assigned shift responsibility on a regular basis and works at the full performance level. He follows written instructions supplied by his supervisor or the previous shift operator. As a shift operator, he determines what work must be done and has the authority to approve overtime or call in necessary maintenance personnel. He relays instructions to the next shift operator including problems encountered and actions taken.

The appellant’s job does not meet conditions 3 and 4. We find that the appellant applies the same skills and knowledge when he is responsible for a shift in the boiler plant as when his supervisor is available. Written contingency procedures are available to guide the appellant in deciding 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.

Although the appellant’s boiler plant shift duties and responsibilities reflect several of the conditions required for additional grade credit, *all* five of the above conditions are not met. No additional credit is appropriate for the appellant’s boiler plant shift responsibility.

We evaluate the appellant's boiler plant operator work as grade 9.

For about 20 percent of the time the appellant assists plumbers in making repairs. Application of the FWS JGS for Plumber, WG-4206, to evaluate the appellant's plumbing assistance work results in grade 7. Application of the FWS JGS for Water Treatment Plant Operator, WG-5409, to evaluate the appellant's water testing and treatment work performed about 10 percent of time results in grade 7.

Decision

The appellant's job is properly classified as Boiler Plant Operator, WG-5402-9.