

Understanding the Special Salary Rate for Certain Geologist, Geophysicist, and Petroleum Engineer Positions in the BSEE and BOEM Gulf of Mexico Region

1. How is the appropriation language worded?

The following has been extracted from the appropriation language of the FY12 Omnibus Appropriations Act.

(c) GULF OF MEXICO REGION—For fiscal years 2012 and 2013, funds made available in this title for the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement may be used by the Secretary of the Interior to establish higher minimum rates of basic pay for employees of the Department of the Interior in the Gulf of Mexico Region in the Geophysicist (GS–1313), Geologist (GS–1350), and Petroleum Engineer (GS–0881) job series at grades 5 through 15 at rates no greater than 25 percent above the minimum rates of basic pay normally scheduled, and such higher rates shall be consistent with the subsections (e) through (h) of section 5305 of title 5, United States Code.

2. What does this mean for me?

This means that money will be available through the Secretary of the Interior for both the Director of BOEM and the Director of BSEE to approve up to an additional 25 percent of basic pay to be paid for Geophysicists (GS–1313), Geologists (GS–1350), and Petroleum Engineers (GS–0881) in the Gulf of Mexico (at grades 5 through 15 through FY 2013, ending September 30, 2013). The specific duty locations impacted by this special pay rate in the Gulf of Mexico Region are Jefferson, Lafayette, Lake Charles, and Houma, Louisiana. While the Lake Jackson, Texas, District Office is part of the Gulf of Mexico Region, their basic pay plus locality pay is higher than the 25 percent allotted by Congress and consequently not able to participate in this supplemental pay.

3. What will the actual percentage be?

The Directors of both BOEM and BSEE have approved 25 percent for all three affected job series.

4. How will my pay be calculated?

The 25 percent will be an additional amount calculated on your basic pay. Your basic pay is the dollar amount for your grade and step on the basic GS nationwide pay table. Note that this is different from the table that you are used to seeing that includes your locality pay. The basic GS nationwide pay table is available at: <http://www.opm.gov/oca/12tables/html/gs.asp>.

5. Will everyone in the series and grades identified above receive the 25 percent?

Depending on grade, step, and region, some employees may already be receiving the highest rate of pay to which they are entitled. For example, employees at the lower levels in the Petroleum Engineer series (GS-0881) may be entitled to a higher rate under the current special rate salary

tables. Employees in the Lake Jackson, Texas, area are already receiving a higher locality rate (28.71 percent under the Houston-Baytown-Huntsville, TX locality table) than the 25 percent would afford them. Pay is set by using any of the following, always to the employee's advantage: the current special salary rates (Table 415 for Petroleum Engineers only), locality pay area tables, or pay under this additional 25 percent special salary rate.

6. Will my high three years of salary, including the special salary rate, be counted toward my annuity calculation upon my retirement?

Yes. These amounts are counted when calculating your retirement annuity.

7. How will my benefits be affected?

This special salary rate is considered part of basic pay for the purposes of Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance, Thrift Savings Plan contributions, and contributions under the Civil Service Retirement or Federal Employees Retirement System.

8. Will my overtime pay rate be calculated using the higher rate?

Yes.

9. If the rest of the government receives a pay adjustment, will I receive a pay adjustment if I am receiving the special salary rate?

Yes. If there is a pay adjustment, it will be calculated on the basic GS nationwide pay table. This special salary table will then be recalculated at 25 percent above the adjustment on the basic GS nationwide pay table.

10. I understand this special pay rate was granted by Congress and will expire on September 30, 2013. What happens to my pay at that time?

No one will have their pay reduced as a result of the special pay rate termination. Affected employees will be placed on the appropriate table for their series and grade. For most employees the pay can be set within the pay steps for their grade; for those where it cannot – pay retention will be granted. (Reference 5 CFR 530.323)

11. Exactly how will pay retention impact me upon expiration of the special salary rate?

If your current rate of pay is less than or equal to the step 10 of your current grade then your pay will be set at the lowest step in your GS grade that is equal to or exceeds your current existing rate of pay at the time the special salary rate expires.

If your current rate of pay exceeds the step 10 of your current grade then your pay at the time of the special salary rate expiration will be retained.

More information on pay retention can be found at the following link:
http://www.opm.gov/oca/pay/HTML/pay_retention.asp

Questions Specific to Movement within Regions or Positions under the Special Rate

12. How would my special salary rate be affected if I decide to apply for a promotion that is not on the special salary rate in the Gulf of Mexico Region (special rate to non-special rate)?

Using the basic GS nationwide pay table (basic pay without locality), increase the GS grade and step by two within-grade increases; this produces the promotion rate entitlement. Compare it to the pay table applicable PRIOR to the promotion, determine that dollar amount. Compare that dollar amount to the applicable locality pay table AFTER the promotion. Find the lowest step in your new GS grade that is equal to or exceeds the promotion rate entitlement. That step rate is your step and grade and salary after promotion.

Example: Petroleum Engineer, GS-881-13, Step 6, on the special salary pay table (\$104,524) in the Gulf of Mexico Region, applies for a Management Position, GS-301, Grade 14, also in the Gulf of Mexico Region (on Rest of the United States pay table).

Using the basic GS nationwide pay table, GS-13, Step 6 (\$83,619), add two Within Grades to Step 8 (\$88,397). Compare GS-13, Step 8, to the pay table held PRIOR to promotion – in this case a GS-13, Step 8 makes \$110,496 on the special salary rate table. Compare that dollar amount to the Rest of the United States pay table applicable in New Orleans at the GS-14 level, looking for the step with the amount that is equal to or exceeding \$110,496. This results in GS-301-14, Step 6, \$112,804.

13. How would my salary be affected if I decide to apply for a position in another geographic area, such as Herndon, Virginia?

For a promotion, it would be similar to the above, special rate to a non-special rate; however, the first calculation would be to adjust for the different geographic location. This is done by converting the employee's rate of pay (grade and step) to the corresponding rate of pay that applies to the employee's EXISTING position of record, if he were already stationed at the new official worksite.

Example: A Geologist on the special salary pay table, GS-13, Step 6, in New Orleans, would be placed on the Herndon, Virginia, pay table at the GS-13, Step 6, before determining promotion entitlement as outlined above. Since there is no special salary rate for Geologists in Herndon, the rate would be based on the Herndon (Washington, DC) Locality pay table. Then the promotion process as described above would be followed.

14. What would happen to my salary if I decided to accept a reassignment from the special salary rate to a non-special salary rate in the same geographic area?

In order for your special salary rate to be considered as a basis for your new non-special salary rate position, all of the following conditions must apply:

(1) The employee is reassigned to another position in the same agency (Department of the Interior) at the same grade level;

(2) The special rate is the employee's rate of basic pay immediately before the reassignment; and

(3) An authorized agency official finds that the need for the services of the employee, and the employee's contribution to the program of the agency, will be greater in the position to which reassigned. An agency must make such determinations on a case-by-case basis. In each case, the agency must document the determination to use the special rate as an employee's highest previous rate in writing (5 CFR 531.222(c)).

The authorizing official would be the Bureau Human Resources Officer.

Please contact your Servicing Personnel Office with any further specific questions related to pay setting under the new special salary rate.