

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

**Appellant:** [appellant]

**Agency classification:** Utility Systems Operator  
WG-5406-8

**Organization:** [name] Ranger District  
[name] National Forests  
[name] Region (Region [x])  
Forest Service  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
[city and state]

**OPM decision:** Utility Systems Operator  
WG-5406-8

**OPM decision number:** C-5406-08-01

/s/ Robert D. Hendler

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Robert D. Hendler  
Classification and Pay Claims  
Program Manager  
Center for Merit System Accountability

March 30, 2009

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

As provided in section S7-8 of the *Operating Manual: Federal Wage System*, this decision constitutes a certificate 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. Addresses are provided in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*, appendix 4, section H.

**Decision sent to:**

[appellant's name and address]

[name]

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## **Introduction**

On September 12, 2008, the Dallas Oversight and Accountability Group of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a job grading appeal from [appellant's name]. He is currently assigned to the [name] Ranger District, [name] National Forests, [name] Region (Region [x]), Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, in [city and state]. His job is currently graded as Utility Systems Operator, WG-5406-8, but he believes it should be graded at either the 9 or 10 level. We received the agency's administrative report on November 19, 2008. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5346 of title 5, United States Code.

## **Background**

The appellant first appealed his job to the Human Capital Management Office at the Forest Service's Albuquerque Service Center on March 7, 2008. The agency's August 4, 2008, decision sustained the current grading of his job. The appellant forwarded his job grading appeal to OPM on September 12, 2008, following a slight delay by the agency in communicating his next available level of appeal.

## **Job information**

The [name] National Forests are geographically divided into five ranger districts (i.e., [five names]) which are combined into zones. The appellant is responsible for operating and maintaining the water treatment and distribution, as well as wastewater treatment and collection, for the zone's campgrounds, administrative facilities, and employee housing for the zone merging the [name]'s [two names} ranger districts. The appellant estimates his zone is occupied by approximately 120 full-time employees and 60 houses during the high season from April to October, and 40 full-time employees and 15 houses during the low season from November to March. An employee occupying an identical additional job is assigned to the zone covering the [names of three districts] ranger districts. Each serves as backup in the other's absence. The zone's utility plants operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, but the appellant said he normally works Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. barring infrequent emergencies and patrol stints as a Forest Protection Officer during holidays and peak times. His job is directly supervised by the incumbent of a National Resource Recreation Manager, GS-401-11, position.

The appellant operates and controls the zone's wastewater treatment process. In 2006, the [district name] ranger district installed a new extended-aeration wastewater treatment plant, replacing the activated sludge plant previously in place, to treat sewage. Operating the new system, made necessary by the aging sludge plant and environmental regulations, occupies the majority of the appellant's work time. He said percentages of time spent on wastewater treatment work doubled from 30 percent, as stated in his job description (JD), to 60 percent. The supervisor concurs. The appellant is responsible for operating the extended aeration plant under the Aquifer Protection Permit and the [state name] Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit, as regulated by the [state] Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ). This work includes collecting, labeling, and documenting effluent samples intended for environmental laboratory analysis. He also makes process decisions to achieve effluent free from unacceptable levels of contaminants such as nitrogen, mercury, fluoride, etc. For example, the appellant tests

the wastewater's biological oxygen demand (BOD), allowing him to monitor and, if necessary, make adjustments affecting the oxygen saturation and the mixed liquor suspended solids concentration rate. He also compiles data and submits reports to ADEQ.

The appellant estimates spending approximately 30 percent of his time on water treatment plant operating work. This involves ensuring the zone's water treatment process adequately removes or reduces the amount of existing contaminants in the water to produce safe potable water as defined by ADEQ and other regulatory agencies. The zone, designated as a community water system (CWS), regularly requires monitoring for major classes of contaminants including volatile organic compounds (VOC), synthetic organic compounds (SOC), inorganic compounds (IOC), radiochemicals, and microbial organisms. By referring to a schedule on his CWS sampling worksheet, the appellant ensures the zone's water is tested monthly for coliform bacteria; quarterly for VOC's, SOC's, and radiochemicals; yearly for lead, copper, and nitrates; every five years for sulfates; and every nine years for asbestos and nitrites. He collects and delivers water samples to an environmental laboratory located 40 miles away. If results show the possible presence of a contaminant, the appellant treats the water, re-samples for further testing, and confirms the toxin's removal with laboratory results. The appellant compiles and submits reports to ADEQ and others including the Consumer Confidence Report to customers detailing where the water comes from, what is in it, and how it can be protected; the Lead and Copper Testing Report; the VOC Testing Report; the IOC Testing Report; and the Radiochemical Testing Report.

The appellant spends the remaining 10 percent of his time responding to the zone's maintenance and repair requests communicated verbally or through written work order requests. The appellant may perform minor repairs; arrange for a plumber, electrician, or other tradesperson the Forest Service has contracted with for their on-call services; or work with the Fire Management Officer with contracting responsibilities to obtain the needed service. His patrol work as Forest Protection Officer is included in this time.

The supervisor did not certify to the accuracy of the appellant's JD, number [number]. In a November 5, 2008, memorandum, she states: "In 2006 significant improvements and upgrades were made to the wastewater treatment system at the [district name] Administrative site where the district office, employee housing and other administrative facilities are located." Like his supervisor, the appellant also expressed concern with the JD's failure to mention the new system and the resultant testing and reporting requirements, but certified to the JD's overall accuracy in an October 22, 2008, statement.

A JD is the official record of the *major duties* and responsibilities assigned to a job by an official with the authority to assign work. Major duties are normally those occupying a significant portion of the employee's time. We find the appellant's JD along with its current evaluation, describes the job's major duties, is adequate for job grading purposes, and is therefore incorporated by reference into this decision. However, the JD's accuracy would benefit from describing the present wastewater treatment system and the additional testing and reporting requirements imposed by the required permits.

To help decide this appeal, we conducted a telephone audit with the appellant on February 6, 2009, a follow up conversation with him on February 13, and a telephone interview with the

immediate supervisor on February 11. In reaching our job grading decision, we carefully considered all of the information gained from these interviews, as well as the written information furnished by the appellant and his agency including the JD of record.

### **Occupational code, title, and standards determination**

The job grading standard (JGS) for the Utility Systems Operating, 5406, occupation covers work concerned primarily with operating two or more utility systems for large buildings or small complexes on a continuing basis. This standard covers jobs combining two or more trade practices. Two main elements are constant, regardless of the possible occupational combinations. They are: (1) the work requires more than one trade practice; and (2) the highest grade level of work is performed in at least two of the trades involved. The appellant's job meets both criteria, as explained below, and is properly graded to the 5406 occupation. Jobs in the 5406 occupation are titled *Utility Systems Operator*.

The 5406 JGS explains how utility systems operator jobs are graded, but it is not described in narrative format as most of the combinations of work are described in other JGSs. The appellant's job involves duties and responsibilities in two trades; i.e., 5408, wastewater treatment plant operating, and 5409, water treatment plant operating work. Therefore, we graded each of the discrete trades involved in the appellant's work by reference to the relevant occupations' JGS to determine the appellant's highest graded work.

### **Grade determination**

The appellant believes the agency's evaluation of his 5409 water treatment work failed to adequately discuss the work's added testing and reporting requirements, but he agrees with their overall assessment of his duties and responsibilities at the grade 8 level. We reviewed the agency's evaluation of his 5409 work, and concur with their findings. Since the appellant disagrees with the agency's evaluation of his 5408 wastewater treatment work, our evaluation will address only the 5408 work.

### ***Evaluation using the 5408 Wastewater Treatment Plant Operating JGS***

The 5408 JGS covers nonsupervisory work involved in the operation of wastewater treatment facilities and plants to treat and dispose of waterborne domestic waste or industrial wastewater. In treatment plants, wastewater is treated to remove contaminants before being discharged back into the environment. Wastewater treatment may involve any or all of the following three phases. It can involve a primary treatment where floatable solids are physically separated from the wastewater; a secondary treatment where dissolved pollutants are converted into a removable form (i.e., changing a non-settleable solid into a settleable solid); or a tertiary treatment where nutrients negatively affecting the water are removed, and often requires advanced treatment methods.

The 5408 JGS describes work at the grades 7, 8, and 9 levels, and uses four factors in determining grade levels, (i.e., *Skill and Knowledge, Responsibility, Physical Effort, and Working Conditions*).

*Skill and Knowledge*

Besides knowledge of equipment used during the primary treatment required at the grade 7 level, wastewater treatment plant operators at the 8 level also have a thorough knowledge of the secondary processes and equipment such as biological filters, oil separators, holding tanks, sand filters, aeration tanks, and oxidation ponds to accomplish the secondary or tertiary treatment phases. Operators at this level know how to collect water samples and conduct tests such as chlorine residual, BOD, acidity or alkalinity, and total solids. They are skilled at making proper adjustments by adding necessary chemicals such as hydrated lime to cultivate anaerobic bacteria. Grade 8 operators take samples from more points in the plant; tests are for additional purposes; and adjustments are made at more locations. They are skilled at filling out reports according to clearly delineated Federal and State requirements, and they are spot-checked by the supervisor or higher graded employee for adhering to the requirements. In addition to the equipment used by grade 7 operators, grade 8 operators also know how to operate and perform minor maintenance on a greater variety of equipment such as pumps, valves, chemical feed machines, and chlorinators. Equipment is more complex at this level since it is used in the secondary, tertiary, or final treatment process to completely treat the wastewater before final discharge to either city wastewater systems or water sources such as lakes and rivers.

At the grade 9 level, wastewater treatment plant operators, in addition to the knowledge of primary and secondary treatment required by grade 8 operators, have a thorough knowledge of the tertiary treatment processes related specifically to industrial wastewater normally encountered in heavy industrial environments. Grade 9 operators know how to monitor and control industrial wastes such as hexavalent chrome, cyanide, hydrazine, penesolve, caustics, and phosphates. They know how to read and follow chemical procedures to treat industrial wastes. They also use instruments such as dissolved oxygen meters, pH meters, water meters, mag meters, and turbidity meters to perform tasks such as adjusting pH and add prescribed amounts of chemicals to precipitate heavy metals. At the grade 9 level, operators know how to collect samples and conduct tests such as phenol, ion concentration, heavy metal content and concentration, suspended or volatile solids, and chemical or radioactive contaminants. They make additional adjustments to chemical additives based upon a prescribed set of Federal and State regulations and report findings according to established guidelines. In addition to equipment used at grade 8, operators at the grade 9 level are skilled in using and operating various kinds of equipment associated with industrial wastewater treatment such as nitrification reactors, chemical flocculation chambers, flash mix tanks, oxidation chambers, clarifiers, sludge thickeners, and ion exchangers. The adjustments made on the various apparatuses are critical since the equipment is used in the final treatment of industrial wastewater before final discharge.

The appellant's wastewater treatment work is primarily to support the unincorporated [name] ranger district. The [name] ranger district is connected to the municipality's system, so the appellant's work there is limited to responding to occasional issues with wastewater collection system problems, septic tanks, etc. Similar to the grade 8 level, his work is responsible for operating the [name] district's extended-aeration wastewater treatment plant. Briefly, the plant operates by pumping raw wastewater through clarifiers, or sedimentation basins, where solids settle out and are pumped away; the biological content is then degraded by aeration and

agitation; and water is pushed through an ultraviolet chamber, disinfected, and discharged back onto the district's earth or streams. As at the grade 8 level, the appellant's work requires knowledge of the entire treatment process and the equipment used at each stage such as filters, aeration tanks, etc. The work specifically requires knowledge of the permits' regulatory requirements, in addition to the ability to interpret metering devices; operate mechanical equipment; adjust plant equipment as necessary; regulate sewage flow; collect, label, and document effluent samples at various treatment phases; and make mathematical calculations in measuring and recording wastewater flow.

Similar to the grade 8 level, the appellant makes necessary adjustments to treatment plant operations based on fluctuating factors such as temperature, seasonal changes, test and sample results, and the current population's usage. To determine which, if any, adjustments to make, the appellant tests wastewater at the beginning and end of the treatment, as well as conducts tests such as BOD, acidity, pH, etc., and uses instruments to determine dissolved oxygen rates, temperature, settling rates, wasting rates, and sludge depth. He also uses a microscope to monitor bacteria in the wastewater. Based on test results, he will add necessary chemicals, e.g., hydrated lime to offset low pH and promote efficient nitrogen removal, to produce a better effluent quality. The appellant also identifies adjustments needed to the plant's structure; e.g., he determined the sun shining directly on the plant's clarifier and aeration tank caused the higher algae growth rate impeding nitrogen removal, and he worked with the facilities engineer in getting a protective cover built. In addition, the appellant oversees wastewater treatment operations for the zone's concessionaires, organizational clubs, work centers, etc., who operate their own systems or are connected to the municipality's systems. His oversight work varies, by site, but generally includes ensuring they collect required samples, water pipes are operational, systems are flushed and drained pre- and post-seasons, and test results are forwarded to him to input into the agency's database for wastewater treatment. He occasionally participates on ADEQ inspections.

The appellant performs maintenance and repair work on plant equipment such as pumps, valves, switches and relays, aeration equipment, collection lines, etc. Maintenance and repair work may involve operating a backhoe or skid steer while digging and backfilling trenches for water or sewer lines. Other examples of this type include cleaning and maintaining the ultraviolet disinfection chamber; replacing sand filters; restoring switches and sensor cables after a lightning strike; and calling for a pump truck to haul away refuse from the digester. These and other examples typical of the appellant's work involves, as at the grade 8 level, maintaining and repairing equipment used throughout the entire wastewater treatment stages.

The appellant's work does not meet the grade 9 level. According to the appellant, he knows how to operate the equipment and apply the chemicals described at the grade 9 level. He also said he is required to treat the plant's wastewater for phosphorus, oil and grease, VOCs, heavy metals, etc., if a test should ever indicate the need. Regardless, the grade 9 level is intended to credit operators required to not only have theoretical and practical knowledge of the tertiary treatment processes related specifically to industrial wastewater, but operators who are also applying this knowledge within a heavy industrial environment. Unlike the appellant's work, operators at the grade 9 level are expected to treat and monitor heavily contaminated waters for pollutants like those described in the JGS such as hexavalent chrome, cyanide, hydrazine, penesolve, caustics,

and phosphates. The contaminants have their own distinctive characteristics setting it apart from domestic wastewater, requiring operators at the grade 9 level to design specific and aggressive strategies to remove the pollutants.

This factor is credited at the grade 8 level.

### *Responsibility*

At the grade 8 level, wastewater treatment plant operators receive work assignments from a supervisor or a higher graded operator who is in charge of the facility or work shift. These assignments may be in the form of written or oral instructions. Overall responsibilities within the framework of established practices, processes, and procedures made by grade 8 operators are more complicated and numerous because the secondary treatment process uses additional and more complex equipment than the pretreatment and primary treatment stages. Grade 8 operators are responsible for conducting tests and measurements similar to grade 7 operators, within prescribed State and Federal standards; however, results are checked and records are reviewed at the completion of the shift. Work is spot-checked by a supervisor or the “operator in charge” for compliance with instructions and regulations.

At the grade 9 level, wastewater treatment plant operators also receive work assignments from a supervisor or a higher graded operator who is in charge of the facility or work shift. Grade 9 operators make independent judgments and decisions within the framework of established practices, processes, and procedures. Grade 9 operators are responsible for all phases of treatment prior to final discharge of wastewater. The judgments and decisions made by grade 9 operators are more complicated and numerous than pretreatment, primary, and secondary non-industrial wastewater treatment processes because the industrial treatment processes require operators to know and respond to additional and more complex chemicals and procedures not encountered in non-industrial wastewater treatment. Responsibility for checking equipment for proper operation, and detecting and correcting malfunctions is greater at the 9 level since operators must neutralize potentially toxic chemicals during the treatment process prior to final discharge. Work is spot-checked by a supervisor or the “operator in charge” for compliance with instructions and regulations.

The appellant’s work fully meets the grade 8 level. As at this level, he independently performs all wastewater treatment phases within the practices, processes, and procedures acceptable to ADEQ and other environmental agencies. With ADEQ requiring an 85 percent average removal rate of BODs and total suspended solids (TSS) from wastewater, the appellant ensures testing at the start and finish of the treatment stages. Wastewater is tested for BOD, TSS, pH, and various pollutants specified by the zone’s permits. The appellant, as required by the Aquifer Protection Permit, records the wastewater’s daily flow; inspects and certifies to the system’s pump operations; and tests for coliform bacteria, total nitrogen, metals, fluoride, mercury, VOCs, etc. Similarly, the [state] Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit involves recording data and testing for like pollutants but additionally requires performing a 24-hour whole effluent toxicity test, every four years, by exposing organisms to different effluent dilutions to forecast when effluent levels are harmful to organisms. The appellant records testing and sampling data in several ADEQ reports, which he submits without prior review or approval by either the



immediate supervisor or Forest Supervisor. Reports may include, but are not limited to, monthly and quarterly flow charts; discharge monitoring reports; and sampling reports for E coli, pH, BOD, VOC, methane, etc. His work fully meets the grade 8 level.

The appellant operates with independence in directing all wastewater treatment phases. The appellant's work situation exceeds the grade 8 level. His work is neither spot-checked nor reviewed since his experience, knowledge, and certification are unique in the zone and Forests. ADEQ classifies a facility in one of four grades based on its system's complexity level with grade 1 being simple and 4 the most complex. The zone's plant requires an operator with a grade 3 certificate, but the appellant is personally pursuing a grade 4 certificate. Once completed, he will be certified to operate a class of facilities above the zone's existing system. However, these personal qualifications are beyond those required by the current qualifications for the job and may not be credited. The immediate supervisor, as a natural resources manager, has no technical wastewater treatment knowledge to assist the appellant in day-to-day work situations. The appellant said his technical resources are rare (e.g., the National Rural Water Association's message board) as most of the readily available information applies to larger municipalities. The district currently treats less than half of the 10,000 gallons of wastewater per day their extended aeration system is intended to treat, resulting in a low BOD and a food shortage supply for bacteria. As a result, the appellant gathered information and determined adding dog food during the low season will facilitate the nitrification process. Nonetheless, these judgment calls fall short of the grade 9 level as he is not making process control decisions concerning the treatment of industrial waste where the waters have been contaminated in some way by industrial or commercial activities. The appellant's work does not meet the grade 9 level.

This factor is credited at the grade 8 level.

#### *Physical Effort*

This factor is the same at the grade 7, 8, and 9 levels. The JGS indicates plant operators do considerable walking, standing on concrete floors, and climbing stairs and ladders. Light to moderate physical effort is needed to turn valves and controls and frequently lift items up to 40 pounds unassisted. This is comparable to the appellant's duties.

#### *Working Conditions*

This factor is also the same at all described grade levels. The JGS states plant operators work indoors and occasionally outside, subject to prevailing weather conditions. Operators are subject to constant noise, rotating machinery, dirt, grease, chemicals, oil, and fumes. They are subject to cuts and abrasions from the use of tools, and burns from chemicals. They may work on catwalks and ladders and must follow prescribed safety practices, and use safety equipment. These conditions are described in the appellant's JD which also describes entry into confined spaces such as attics, under buildings, and into tall tanks, toilet vaults or storage tanks in accordance with approved procedures. These situations require the use of safety procedures and equipment discussed in the JGS.

In summary, since all the factors are credited at the 8 level, the appellant's job is properly evaluated at the grade 8 level.

### *Special Additional Responsibilities*

The 5406 JGS describes special circumstances warranting an additional grade credit for functioning as the "operator in charge" on second and third shifts and on weekends. In his September 4, 2008, initial appeal request to OPM, the appellant seeks "operator in charge" credit:

I am the sole Operator in charge and make all process control decisions including troubleshooting, repairs, changes, reporting of all records, researching problems, system adjustments, additives, sampling, testing, etc. The plant operates on a 24 hour/7 day week, and most generally does not require weekend or night work. However, if a problem arises, then I am responsible for obtaining needed parts and personnel for corrective action.

The 5406 JGS describes five conditions under which an additional grade may be credited for "operator in charge" responsibility. Only positions clearly meeting all conditions may be granted the additional grade credit. Criteria are:

1. The operator, at the full performance level, must be assigned shift responsibility on a regular and recurring basis.
2. The operator follows written instructions supplied by the supervisor or by the "operator in charge" on the previous shift.
3. The operator 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 to provide specific guidance and assistance.
4. The operator, in the absence of written contingency procedures, 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 typically has responsibility to determine what work must be done and has authority to approve overtime or call in necessary maintenance personnel.

Jobs meeting the above criteria are credited an additional grade regardless of their working alone or in a small group of plant operating employees. Only one operator per shift may be credited the additional grade for shift-level responsibility. The criteria are not individually distinct but must be considered as a whole; Condition 1, crediting operators for regularly working shift responsibility, is the core requirement. All other criteria assume this first condition is met. For example, Condition 2 follows by describing an operator adhering to written instructions given by an individual from the previous shift. Implicit in meeting Condition 1 is the plant's being sufficiently complex to demand multiple staffed shifts for ensuring its proper operation and

compliance with Federal and State environmental regulations. Most wastewater treatment plants run on a 24-hour, 7-day shift with operators assigned to a specific shift or rotate working on all three shifts including weekends. On second, third, and weekend shifts, an employee is typically designated as the 'operator in charge' of the complete plant, including ancillary and stand-alone wastewater treatment facilities which may be geographically dispersed. While the 5406 JFS allows for crediting an employee working alone as an "operator in charge," this, however, does not invalidate the need for the plant to be suitably complex to warrant multiple shifts. Plants with various shifts entail additional difficulty and responsibility on plant operators with tasks involving the seamless transitioning between work shifts, resolving problems originating from previous shifts, communicating problems to the next shift, etc.

The appellant's plant operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, but it is staffed by a single employee on a single shift. Instead, the appellant normally works Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., days and hours generally corresponding to those of his supervisor who is normally available for programmatic consultation and guidance. The appellant occasionally responds to emergencies (e.g., when back up alarms are activated, pipes break, etc.) occurring outside his normal hours, but the immediate supervisor said this occurs irregularly, approximately two or three times a year. We credited the appellant's troubleshooting, repairing, reporting, and other operating work as discussed previously under **Grade determination**. Because he works in a "one-person, one-shift" plant operation, the appellant is not required to regularly work during a second or third shift, or on weekends. Condition 1 is, therefore, not met.

The appellant's work does not meet the core shift-responsibility requirement, but we will briefly discuss the remaining conditions to fully address the appellant's concerns. Conditions 2, 3, and 5 are not met because the appellant works during hours with a supervisor available. The supervisor's presence alone would not automatically preclude an employee from "operator-in-charge" credit. However, considering his immediate supervisor's proximity (located on the same ranger district), availability (working generally the same days and hours), and accessibility (organized with a short chain of command and narrow span of control), it would not be appropriate to discount the supervisor's presence by crediting the appellant's job with meeting Conditions 2, 3, and 5. The supervisor lacks technical plant operating knowledge to assist the appellant in day-to-day work but is available and expects to be involved in significant programmatic plant operating decisions affecting service disruptions to their zone's customers, concessionaires, organizational clubs, work centers, etc. As stated in the appellant's PD:

The incumbent works under the general supervision of the Recreation Staff Officer on the ranger district who makes assignments and spot checks work during progress.  
Instructions are for the purpose of providing priorities, guidance, and work scheduling.

Conditions 2, 3, and 5 are intended to credit employees with applying a higher level of skill and knowledge when no supervisor is available. In contrast to Condition 2, which is credited to operators for following instructions given by the previous shift's supervisor or "operator in charge," the appellant's job does not require interpreting and executing instructions from previous shift employees as the plant is operational during normal working hours only; and the supervisor, if assigning work or projects, is readily available to address questions or concerns. The supervisor's availability also precludes crediting the appellant's job with Condition 3, which

is credited to operators performing more responsible duties and requiring a slightly higher skill and knowledge level than the full performance operators on duty where a supervisor is available. Condition 5 is credited to operators with responsibility for determining what work must be done and the authority to approve overtime or call in necessary maintenance personnel. This type of decision-making assumes the operator has authority to determine the scope of the work to be done, and to decide without prior supervisory approval whether to approve overtime for personnel on site, recall staff to perform work, or call in maintenance personnel. The appellant's authority is not as broad as operators described under Condition 5, who are authorized to approve those overtime and maintenance personnel costs frequently requiring considerable cost expenditures. The appellant identifies and makes recommendations for maintaining or repairing plant operations. He uses his Government-issued credit card with its \$2,500 single-purchase limit for routine supplies. The supervisor has not established a limit for purchases requiring prior approval, but the appellant is required to notify the supervisor of any transactions outside the norm including those for maintenance personnel which may require coordination with the facilities engineer as well. Conditions 2, 3, and 5 are not met.

Condition 4 is credited when operators, in the absence of written contingency procedures, are responsible for 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. In his initial request to OPM, the appellant supports crediting his job with Condition 4, stating:

As the sole certified operator in charge I have the authority, responsibility and knowledge to shut down the systems when necessary and put in place whatever repairs or temporary means of operation is necessary to provide service and perform repairs.

We agree the appellant has a thorough knowledge of the wastewater treatment operations in order to locate problems and initiate immediate corrective action to maintain adequate effluent treatment. According to the appellant, the zone has not adopted specific written contingency or standard operating procedures other than broad Federal and State environmental regulations, in addition to the plant's manufacturer's manual. Consequently, the appellant is responsible for making the judgment call when the plant is required to shut down. However, since the appellant's job does not meet all of the "operator in charge" conditions, additional credit is not warranted.

### **Decision**

The appellant's job is properly graded as Utility Systems Operator, WG-5406-8.