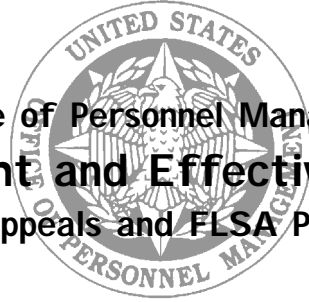


U.S. Office of Personnel Management  
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness  
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs



Philadelphia Oversight Division  
600 Arch Street, Room 3400  
Philadelphia, PA 19106-1596

**Classification Appeal Decision**  
**Under Section 5346 of Title 5, United States Code**

**Appellants:** [appellants' names]

**Agency classification:** Air Conditioning Equipment Mechanic  
WG-5306-10

**Organization:** Electric, Air Conditioning and Laundry  
Repair Shop  
Maintenance and Repair Section  
Engineering Service  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Medical Center  
[location]

**OPM decision:** Air Conditioning Equipment Mechanic  
WG-5306-10

**OPM Decision Number:** C-5306-10-03

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Robert D. Hendler  
Classification Appeals Officer

/s/ 1/29/99  
Date

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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 specified in section 532.705(f) of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

**Decision sent to:**

PERSONAL

[appellant's name]

[appellant's address]

[name]

Business Office Manager

VA Medical Center

[location]

PERSONAL

appellant's name]

[appellant's address]

Bath, NY 14180

Mr. Ronald E. Cowles

Deputy Assistant Secretary for

Human Resources Management

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

810 Vermont Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20420

## **Introduction**

On November 19, 1998, the Philadelphia Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a job grading appeal from [appellant's name]. On December 2, 1998, the Philadelphia Oversight Division of OPM also received a job grading appeal from [appellant's name]. Messrs. [appellants' names] occupy identical additional jobs currently graded as Air Conditioning Equipment Mechanic, WG-5306-10. Their jobs were changed from Air Conditioning Equipment Mechanic, WG-5306-11 to Air Conditioning Equipment Mechanic, WG-5306-10 by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center, [location] on August 30, 1998. In an appeal decision issued by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs on October 27, 1998, the agency concluded the jobs were properly graded as Air Conditioning Equipment Mechanic, WG-5306-10. The appellants believe their jobs should be evaluated as Air Conditioning Mechanic, WG-5306-11. They work in the Electric, Air Conditioning and Laundry Repair Shop, Maintenance and Repair Section, Engineering Service, VA Medical Center, [location]. We have accepted and decided their appeal under section 5346 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

## **General issues**

The appellants made various statements in their appeal letters and during the telephone audit about the reasons their job descriptions (JD's) were rewritten and the adequacy of the audit performed by the Personnel Management Specialist at the Medical Center. In addition, [appellant's name] said he felt the VA entered a contract by hiring his services as a grade 11, and that contract should be kept. In adjudicating this appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper grading of this job. By law, we must grade jobs solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM job grading standards (JGS's), guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5346), and instructions. Therefore, we have considered the appellants' statements only insofar as they are relevant to making that comparison. The appellants also believe that the WG-5306 standard is outdated. However, the content of standards established for this job is not appealable (section 532.701 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations).

The job grading appeal process is a de novo review that includes a determination as to the duties and responsibilities assigned by management and performed by the appellants, and constitutes the proper application of JGS's to those duties and responsibilities. We have evaluated the work assigned by management and performed by the appellants according to these job grading requirements. In reaching our decision, we carefully reviewed the information provided by both the appellants and their agency, including the appellants' job description (JD) of record (JD #05248A). In addition, we conducted a telephone audit with the appellants on January 19, 1999, and with their supervisor, [name], on January 20, 1999.

## **Job information**

The appellants maintain, repair, relocate, balance, modify and install the refrigeration, air conditioning and heating and ventilating systems at their Medical Center. The repair, calibration and overhaul work requires a knowledge of the construction characteristics of a variety of types and models of systems designed to maintain climate controlled environments under a variety of circumstances. The appellants follow a planned preventive maintenance program, make checks and inspections as

required, submit report data and submit requisitions for replacement of controls and all other necessary repairs. They are certified to handle different types of refrigerant products, ensuring their proper handling and disposal. The appellants receive their assignments with a minimum of accompanying instructions concerning the work methods or the materials to be used. Their supervisor is available for advice or assistance on very difficult problems. Normally supervision is administrative or involves the coordination of equipment and material procurement. The appellants' job description and other material of record furnish much more information about their duties and responsibilities and how they are performed and is hereby incorporated by reference into this decision.

### **Occupation, title, and standards determination**

The agency has allocated the job as Air Conditioning Equipment Mechanic, WG-5306 with which the appellants have not disagreed and with which we concur. Therefore, we find the appealed job is allocated properly as Air Conditioning Equipment Mechanic, WG-5306.

### **Grade determination**

In the Federal Wage System (FWS), grade levels of jobs are not determined by accumulation of grade levels of work performed, but by the highest grade of work that is regular and recurring as defined by established OPM job grading guidance. To be credited, a level in a JGS must be met fully.

The Air Conditioning Equipment Mechanic, WG-5306 JGS uses four factors for grade determination: *Skill and Knowledge, Responsibility, Physical Effort, and Working Conditions.*

#### *Skill and Knowledge*

At the grade 10 level, mechanics use a knowledge of the refrigeration cycle of a variety of commercial and industrial systems to find and check elements such as those which control low side and high side pressure; the temperature of the cooling units; the temperatures of the liquid and suction lines; and the running time of the various mechanisms. They check for the probability of leaks by visual and audible examination of equipment components; by applying prescribed test procedures and equipment; and by exploration of probable reasons for equipment failure. Grade 10 mechanics know principles and theories of air conditioning and refrigeration such as the refrigeration cycle, heat transfer laws, the use of refrigerant tables; how to calculate airflow, and the pressure-temperature characteristics for the different systems to find and repair faulty equipment swiftly and to reduce inoperative time to a minimum. They know how to find trouble before dismantling, and to make repairs which insure proper functioning after assembly.

Grade 10 mechanics work on larger, more varied and complex systems where malfunctions are more difficult to find because the controls are more difficult to balance. For example, the systems may include those with a variety of compressors such as gear, reciprocating, centrifugal, or rotary pump, and a variety of refrigerant controls such as those with low and high pressure side floats, automatic thermostatic expansion valves, capillary or choke types, and those based on volume or quantity changes. A variety of complicated motor controls are also used such as hermetically sealed motors

and pressure controls, thermostatic motor controls (remote and double remote), full and semi-automatic defrosting controls, relays, and other controls to protect against overload or overheating. Various types of power sources are used with various combinations of pulleys, belts, horse power capacity, and tensioners.

Grade 10 mechanics use skills to make more complete repairs. For example, they may dismantle, repair and reassemble units such as pumps, impellers, compressors, chillers, receivers, and evaporators. When making repairs of this nature, they perform more complex repairs such as installing and fitting connecting rods, crank shafts, piston rings, bearings, and bushings; overhauling valves by adjusting or replacing gaskets, springs, floats, diaphragms, valve fittings, seals, and couplings; and aligning motors and flywheel drives. They use skill to install or replace pipes and ducts where the areas to be conditioned are a considerable distance from compressors.

Systems serviced at the grade 10 level are large and provide for a variety of air conditioning functions such as heating, cooling, humidifying, dehumidifying, cleaning, filtering and circulating, and are used to condition the air for different kinds of structures such as warehouses, hospitals, and large office buildings and complexes including those with areas that have special requirements such as operating rooms, laboratories, clean rooms, and other areas with sensitive equipment. The systems use a variety of methods of air conditioning such as mechanical compression, vapor compression, absorption, steam jet or air cycle.

We find the appellants work matches that described at the grade 10 level. They perform the maintenance, repair, move, balancing, modification and installation of equipment such as pumps, compressors, evaporators, ice flakers and cubers, walk-in coolers, domestic type refrigerators, chilled drinking water coolers and systems, central heating, ventilating and air conditioning systems, pneumatic/electronic control system, air conditioning units of all types, heat pumps, canteen refrigeration equipment and systems, heating ventilating air conditioning units and systems, and also special refrigerating and humidifying units and systems including the morgue, blood bank, nursing home care unit, Respiratory Care Units (RCU's), and the isolation rooms at the Medical Center.

The larger and more complex work examples the appellants cited in their appeal letters and during the telephone audit reflect applying grade 10 skills and knowledge described in the JGS. These include the units for the patient isolation rooms, the blast chillers for Dietetics, the morgue air conditioning units and incubator, the repairs on the intensive care unit (ICU) chiller, reinstallation of equipment in the dental suite, installation of new refrigeration lines in the mess hall, and changing the system in the Information Resource Management from a water to an air cooled system.

The appellants' work does not match that described at the grade 11 level of the JGS. At that level, repair and overhaul work requires a knowledge of the construction characteristics of a variety of types and models of systems that are designed to reach and maintain critical and extreme conditions under a variety of circumstances. The systems are more complex in design and physical layout than those described at the grade 10 level and the details of construction are more complicated than commercial and industrial systems designed to provide a constant set of conditions. Grade 11 work involves installing, recognizing the cause of faulty equipment, and repairing, modifying and moving

equipment on various special-purpose air conditioning units and systems that are frequently modified to provide specific and critical climatic conditions in laboratories and other experimental or test activities.

The appellants' work does not entail the frequent modification of special purpose air conditioning units and systems under the conditions described at the grade 11 level; i.e., frequently modifying types and models of systems designed to reach and maintain critical and extreme conditions of tests and experiments. Their JD does not describe such work, and the examples given by the appellants fail to meet that level. Some work examples described by the appellants were maintaining, repairing and modifying the Rheem Scientific Products Freezer located in the Research Laboratory, the Hotpack unit in the Clinical Laboratory, the units in the patient isolation rooms, blast chillers for Dietetics, morgue air conditioning units and incubator, and air conditioning units for the hospital's laboratory, research laboratory, computer center, and ICU. These units are monitored daily as part of a preventive maintenance schedule and modified as needed. However, they do not entail the need for frequent modification under critical climatic conditions in experimental or test activities as described at the grade 11 level in the JGS. Therefore, this factor is evaluated at the grade 10 level.

### *Responsibility*

At the grade 10 level, the supervisor assigns work orally and through work orders accompanied by building plans, shop sketches, or blueprints. Mechanics plan their testing procedures, determine the proper kind and type of parts and equipment they need and install and repair a variety of systems with little or no check during the progress of the assignment. Completed work is checked to insure that it meets accepted practices. Responsibility is greater than at lower levels, because the systems are more complex and, therefore, more difficult to balance. This requires more frequent and more difficult determinations concerning the location of faulty equipment and the kind and type of supplies and repairs needed to repair and balance the systems. Because there is a greater variety of equipment in the more complex systems, repairs are more numerous and complex.

At the grade 11 level, mechanics receive their assignments with a minimum of accompanying instructions concerning the work methods or the materials to be used. They may work directly with engineering or testing personnel while planning and modifying a system to meet specific conditions. During the course of the projects, they are expected to do repair and modification to meet conditions which are required by technical personnel. Their supervisor is available for advice or assistance on very difficult problems, but grade 11 mechanics are expected to complete their work without undue interruption to the project. They consult with their supervisor on problems which are unique, or on administrative problems such as the need for additional equipment. The responsibility is greater at the grade 11 level than at the grade 10 level because more frequent judgments and more difficult decisions are made concerning the kind and type of work that must be done to modify the equipment in a way that meet the requirements of specific and critical climatic conditions.

We find the responsibility exercised by the appellants meets the grade 10 level. They perform regular preventive maintenance based on a prescribed schedule. Work orders are assigned by the supervisor with a minimum of accompanying instructions. The appellants function with the freedom from

supervision more typical of that described at the grade 11 level in the JGS. They are the only air conditioning mechanics at the Medical Center, they perform their work independently, and they receive their assignments with a minimum of accompanying instructions concerning work methods or the material to be used. Normally their supervision is administrative in nature. However, the complexity and the nature of their assignments do not approach the difficulty described at the grade 11 level. They do not work directly with engineering or testing personnel while planning and modifying a system to meet specific conditions, and they are not expected during the projects to make repairs and modifications to meet conditions required by technical personnel. The systems on which the appellants work do not require or permit the frequent judgments and more difficult decisions concerning the kind and type of work that must be done to modify the equipment in a manner that will meet requirements of specific critical climatic conditions envisioned at the grade 11 level. Therefore, this factor is evaluated at the grade 10 level.

### *Physical Effort*

The physical effort found at the grade 10 and grade 11 levels are essentially the same. At the grade 10 level, equipment in the system is usually larger and must be maneuvered into and out of specific locations while dismantling and reassembling. Grade 10 mechanics frequently carry and set up parts and equipment that weigh up to 23 kilograms (50 pounds). They operate hoists, holders, and pulleys when removing units such as large compressors, condensers, and chillers. Grade 10 mechanics make repairs and installations from ladders, scaffolding and platforms where the parts of systems worked on are frequently in hard-to-reach places. Therefore, stooping, stretching, bending, and kneeling are frequently for longer time periods than that described at the grade 8 level.

We find the appellants' physical effort meets the grade 10 level. Appellants daily tasks require physical effort in handling equipment and other heavy objects during installation, working in close quarters and in kinds of positions and angles and hard to reach places. They set up and carry weights of 50 pounds. Therefore, this factor is evaluated at the grade 10 level.

### *Working Conditions*

The working conditions found at the grade 10 and grade 11 levels are generally similar. Grade 10 mechanics are occasionally required to work outside, on top of tall buildings, in drafty attic spaces, and in cramped areas with low overhangs. Occasionally they may wear uncomfortable face masks and protective clothing when there is a possibility of exposure to toxic refrigerants. The systems are large at the grade 10 level and refrigerants are used in large amounts. Therefore, grade 10 mechanics are subject to larger amounts of escaping gases when making emergency repairs.

We find the appellants' working conditions meet the grade 10 level. They are frequently exposed to fumes, extreme cold and heat conditions and the work can be dirty and greasy. They are exposed to the possibility of strains, cuts, bruises, burns and electrical shock. Therefore, this factor is evaluated at the grade 10 level.

*Summary*

The appealed job is graded properly as Air Conditioning Equipment Mechanic, WG-5306-10.