

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Division for Human Capital Leadership & Merit System Accountability
Classification Appeals Program

Atlanta Field Services Group
75 Spring Street, SW., Suite 1018
Atlanta, GA 30303-3109

Pay Category Appeal Decision
Under section 5103 of title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [appellant]

Agency classification: Electronics Mechanic
WG-2604-11

Organization: [organization]
[organization]
Veterans Affairs Medical Center
Department of Veterans Affairs
[location]

OPM decision: Properly assigned to the
Federal Wage System

OPM decision number: C-2604-00-02

/s/ Virginia L. Magnuson
Virginia L. Magnuson
Classification Appeals Officer

October 16, 2003
Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, this decision constitutes a certificate that is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the government. The agency is responsible for reviewing its classification decisions for identical, similar, or related positions to ensure consistency with this decision. There is no right of further appeal. This decision is subject to discretionary review only under conditions and time limits specified in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*, appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

Decision sent to:

[appellant]
[address]
[location]

[name]
Chief of Human Resources
Management Service (05)
Veterans Affairs Medical Center 614
[address]
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Human Resources Officer
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Introduction

On July 25, 2003, the Atlanta Field Services Group, U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), accepted a pay category appeal from [appellant]. The appellant works as an Electronics Mechanic, WG-2604-11, in the [organization], [organization], Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC), Department of Veterans Affairs, [location]. The appellant believes that his job should be placed in the General Schedule (GS) as an Electronics Technician, GS-856-10. This appeal has been accepted and processed under section 5103 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.). We received a complete administrative report from the agency on August 11, 2003.

Background information

The appellant disagrees with the agency's placement of his job in the Federal Wage System (FWS). He believes that his primary duties involving installing, performing preventive maintenance, running performance evaluations, calibrating, repairing, and modifying computer and networked computer based systems are more appropriate for placement in the GS rather than the FWS. He indicates that the 2604 job grading standard (JFS) identifies work involved in installing, maintaining, and repairing electronic mainframe computers and associated peripheral equipment as work not covered by the standard.

In May 2003, the appellant submitted an appeal to his agency requesting that his job be reclassified as Electronics Technician, GS-856-10. On June 30, 2003, his agency issued a decision sustaining the existing classification. The appellant subsequently appealed to OPM.

General issues

The appellant attached copies of six vacancy announcements, including two from other VAMCs, for positions in the Electronics Technician Series, GS-856, which he states are worded very similarly to his job description. He believes that the duties described for the positions at the two VAMCs are identical to those he performs as an Electronics Mechanic, WG-2204. He questions why the agency has position descriptions identical to his job description (JD) classified as Electronics Technician, GS-856, while his job does not meet the criteria. The appellant also makes various statements regarding his agency's evaluation of his job. In adjudicating this appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of his job. By law, we must make that decision solely by comparing his current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5346). We have considered the appellant's statements only insofar as they are relevant in making that comparison. Our decision is limited to whether or not the appellant's job is covered by the FWS.

Like OPM, the appellant's agency must classify its jobs and positions based on comparison to OPM standards and guidelines. However, the agency also has primary responsibility for ensuring that its jobs and positions are classified consistently with OPM appeal decisions. If the appellant considers his job so similar to others that they all warrant the same classification, he may pursue the matter by writing to his agency's personnel office. In doing so, he should specify the precise organizational location, classification, duties, and responsibilities of the

positions in question. If the positions are found to be basically the same as his job, the agency must correct their classification to be consistent with this appeal decision. Otherwise, the agency should explain to him the differences between his job position and the others.

In deciding this appeal, we have carefully reviewed all information furnished by the appellant and the agency, including information obtained from telephone interviews with the appellant and his immediate supervisor.

Job information

The appellant occupies one of two Electronics Mechanic jobs located in the Electrical/Electronics Unit and is responsible for providing a wide range of technical support for a variety of computer and networked computer based electronic systems and equipment. He spends 75 percent of his time servicing, maintaining, repairing, fabricating, overhauling, modifying, installing, troubleshooting, and performing preventive maintenance on a number of the Center's function-specific and networked computer based systems. This equipment controls and operates the Center's fire alarm, nurse call, security and parking access control, security camera, hospital equipment tracking, and digital media player systems. The appellant's responsibilities include verifying the proper installation of system hardware, software, networking protocols, and peripheral equipment. He determines if components attached to the computers and network systems are functioning properly and repairs or replaces those that are not. He removes old software and installs new or upgraded software, files, and drivers, and peripheral equipment such as printers, keyboards, monitors, external drives, cables, etc. The other 25 percent of his time is spent performing identical work (servicing, maintaining, repairing, etc.), on a variety of electronic equipment including television and radio entertainment and broadcast, two-way radio communication, pocket paging, intercom, analog and digital satellite, and analog nurse call systems.

The appellant's JD, certified by the appellant and the agency as current and accurate, and other material of record furnish much more information about his duties and responsibilities and how they are performed and are incorporated by reference into this decision.

Pay category determination

Section 5102 of 5 U.S.C. requires that a pay category determination be made as the first step in the position classification process. Section 5102(c)(7) exempts from the GS employees in recognized trades or crafts, or other skilled mechanical crafts, or unskilled, semi-skilled, or skilled manual labor occupations, and other employees in jobs having trade, craft, or laboring experience and knowledge as the paramount requirement. The OPM *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards* defines paramount requirement as the essential, prerequisite knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to perform the primary duty or responsibility for which the position has been established. Whether particular types of positions are trades, crafts, or manual labor jobs within the meaning of title 5 depends primarily on the most important requirement for the performance of a primary duty or responsibility for which the position exists.

If a job clearly requires trade, craft, or laboring experience and knowledge as a requirement for the performance of its primary duty, the job is under the FWS. A position requiring knowledge or experience of an administrative, clerical, scientific, artistic, or technical nature not related to trade, craft, or manual labor work for the performance of its paramount duty, even though physical work is required, is subject the GS. Paramount does not rely on percentages of work time.

As stated in his JD, the appellant's primary duties and responsibilities are the servicing, maintaining, repairing, installing, troubleshooting, and performing preventive maintenance on computer and networked computer systems that control critical Center systems. The appellant also services, repairs, and maintains a variety of non-computer based electronic equipment. Work assignments are downloaded from the area reserved for work requests on the Center's computer system. The appellant prioritizes his work and independently carries out his assignments. The appellant uses a variety of sophisticated electrical, electronic, and video test and analysis equipment, such as dual trace oscilloscope, in-line watt meter, digital multimeter, communication, signal, and digital interface and dataline analyzers in carrying out his duties. Regular and recurring work requires knowledge of electronic principles, theories, and the characteristics of electronics.

The appellant believes that his assignments are equivalent to those of Electronics Technicians placed in the GS. The Introduction to the Electronic Equipment Installation and Maintenance Family 2600, provides valuable guidance on differentiating between FWS and GS work. In distinguishing between mechanic (FWS) and technician (GS) work, "the difference between the electronic mechanics and electronic technicians is not so much in the types of skills, knowledges, and abilities possessed but in the degree to which they are possessed and the manner in which they are used." In assessing repair work, repair of electronic systems and equipment of the type generally performed in overhaul shops is "characteristically a trade function." Such trades work "includes detecting and diagnosing malfunctions, tearing down equipment, repairing or replacing parts or components, and aligning and calibrating and testing the modified or repaired equipment. Positions in which the performance of such repair function is the paramount requirement are trades positions." Repair work is GS technician work when it is performed in connection with "engineering functions such as developing and designing test and repair equipment, analyzing present repair practices and developing procedural instructions for use by others on methods and steps of equipment repair, or conducting engineering evaluations of the adequacy of such things as the test and calibration equipment used in making repairs."

The Electronic Equipment Installation and Maintenance Family 2600 (2600 Introduction), which includes the 2604 occupation, covers all occupations and jobs the duties of which are to supervise and/or perform work involved in installing, repairing, overhauling, fabricating, tuning, aligning, modifying, testing, calibrating, and inspecting electronic equipment and related devices. This includes equipment such as AM/FM radio broadcast receivers, high fidelity record players and tape recorders, and TV receivers, public address systems, radio communications receivers and transmitters, radar, loran, and sonar, radio teletype units, low frequency, broadband, and multichannel broadband carrier systems, mobile and fixed television systems and equipment, computers, and other similar systems and equipment. The appellant's predominant assignments involving repair, maintenance, and installation functions are comparable to those

discussed in the 2600 Introduction. The specific duties and responsibilities that he performs and equipment on which they are performed, including computers, are specifically covered by the 2604 occupation. The appellant does not repair electronic mainframe computers and associated peripheral equipment, the type of work identified by the appellant as excluded by the 2604 occupation and covered by the 2608 occupation. Jobs such as the appellant's in which the performance of maintenance and installation functions is the paramount requirement are trade and crafts jobs.

By contrast, the 2600 Introduction indicates that GS technicians may perform similar repair, maintenance, and installation work in connection with the paramount requirement for performance of engineering functions. Work identified as having the performance of engineering functions as a paramount requirement includes developing and designing test and repair equipment, analyzing present repair practices, and developing procedural instructions for use by others on methods and steps of equipment repair, or conducting engineering evaluations of the adequacy of such things as the test and calibration equipment used in making repairs. Also identified as technician-level work is that involving the development of maintenance standards and procedures for use by others, the engineering test and evaluation of new or modified electronic systems, or analyzing the compatibility of interlocking components, systems, and equipment for the purpose of redesign of the equipment to increase compatibility. Work associated with planning and directing the installation of complex electronic systems and associated facilities, particularly where there are problems of site selection and construction, dealing with contractors and public utilities, and modification of the equipment to adapt to novel site characteristics, frequently requires engineering competence. Specifically, the GS-856 series, identified by the appellant as covering his job, requires ability to apply knowledge of electronics techniques and theories to duties involved in similar engineering functions. Engineering functions such as these are not a component of the organizational responsibilities of the Electrical/Electronics Unit or the appellant's assigned responsibilities. The appellant's responsibilities primarily involve the use of trade and crafts knowledge and skills to provide technical support for computer and networked computer based systems and other non-computer based electronic equipment.

The appellant's primary and paramount duties flow from the mission and function of the organization in which he works. These duties involve servicing, maintaining, repairing, troubleshooting, and performing preventive maintenance on computer and network based systems and peripheral equipment and other complex electronic equipment. The work requires trades knowledge of electronics principles and practices to identify the cause of operating problems and properly repair, install, and maintain electronic equipment. Trades experience and knowledge reflect the paramount, or the essential prerequisite knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to perform the primary duties of the appellant's job.

Decision

The appellant's job is properly covered by the Federal Wage System.