



United States
Office of Personnel Management

Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Digest of Significant Classification Decisions and Opinions
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Standard: N/A
Factor: N/A
Issue: Crediting "emergency" work

Identification of the Classification Issue

Attack Warning Officers had the responsibility to disseminate information instantly and decisively on reports of emergencies which could conceivably include enemy attacks as well as reports of other disaster conditions that were considered threatening to life or property. Attack Warning Officers were found by the Office of Personnel Management to be operating at the GS-11 level for, ostensibly, the preponderance of their time and at the GS-12 level on an irregular, nonrecurring, emergency basis. Normally, the grade of a position is not determined by work that is of an emergency, infrequent, incidental, or temporary nature.

Resolution

The Classification Appeals Office observed that the Attack Warning Officers' readiness to accomplish their mission must be constant. Indeed, they conducted daily tests to maintain both the systems and their readiness. It surely could not be said that their readiness to accomplish their most responsible and stressful duties was of an infrequent, incidental, or temporary nature. While many positions in many occupations occasionally require the performance of higher level duties that are not grade controlling, a true emergency would, in all likelihood, not be listed in a position description because of its unpredictable nature. However, there are certain occupations that exist for the purpose of dealing with emergencies, however infrequently occurring. For example, firefighters fight fires only on an emergency basis but this is the basic purpose of the position, requires materially higher qualifications, and is clearly identified in the position description as the preeminent major duty, irrespective of time spent actually fighting fires. Another example is presented in the Grade Evaluation Guide for Police and Security Guard positions. Grade level

credit is provided for maintaining proficiency in specialized weapons and tactics for defending against and/or repelling terrorists. Proficiency is maintained and demonstrated in drills, simulations, and refresher training as a function of normal security patrol and protection duties. Thus, the focus is on readiness for potential emergencies and credit for maintaining that readiness. In the case of the Attack Warning Officers, the basic reason for the existence of the positions was to serve as Attack Warning Officers in the event of a true national emergency. Therefore, the readiness for dealing with specifically defined emergencies was a constant and integral feature of the position's requirements, like firefighter positions. Consequently, the Classification Appeals Office upgraded the positions from grade GS-11 to GS-12.