

**JOB GRADING APPEAL DECISION OF THE
OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
CHICAGO FIELD SERVICE OFFICE**

INCUMBENT: [the appellant]
POSITION NUMBER: 3030A
AGENCY GRADING: Maintenance Mechanic
WG-4749-9
POSITION LOCATION: Department of Veterans Affairs
Medical Center
Engineering Service
Maintainance and Repair Section
Building Maintainance Shop
[location]
OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT DECISION: **Maintenance Mechanic
WG-4749-9**
OPM DECISION NUMBER: C-4749-09-01

This appellate decision constitutes a certificate that is mandatory and binding on administrative, certifying, payroll, and accounting offices of the Government. It is the final administrative decision on the grading of the job, not subject to further appeal. It is subject to discretionary review only under the conditions specified in 5 C.F.R. 532.705 (f).

Frederick J. Boland
Classification Appeals Officer

____3/21/96_____

DATE

DECISION TRANSMITTED TO:

[CCs]

INFORMATION CONSIDERED

- ▶ Letter of appeal, dated March 3, 1995, along with enclosed documents.
- ▶ Copy of the official description of the appellant's position, number 3030A.
- ▶ Copy of the classifier's position report dated May 19, 1993.
- ▶ Copy of the official description of the appellant's supervisor's position.
- ▶ Copy of the appellant's performance standards.
- ▶ Copy of the organizational and functional charts for the Engineering Service.
- ▶ Agency letter of November 28, 1995, and its enclosures.
- ▶ Information developed in a telephone interview with the appellant on January 12, 1996.

- ▶ Information developed in a telephone interview with his supervisor on January 12, 1996.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

- ▶ OPM Job Grading Standard for Mason, WG-3603, dated November 1969.
- ▶ OPM Job Grading Standard for Plasterer, WG-3605, dated November 1969.
- ▶ OPM Job Grading Standard for Insulator, WG-3610, dated September 1974.
- ▶ OPM Job Grading Standard for Maintenance Mechanic, WG-4749, dated May 1974.

INTRODUCTION

The appellant contests a decision made by the [VA] in grading his job. He is assigned to job number 3030A, graded May 15, 1993, as a Maintenance Mechanic, WG-4749-9. The job is under the [VA].

The appellant requests that his job be graded as a Maintenance Mechanic, WG-4749-10. He performs work in three different areas: masonry, insulation, and plastering and feels his job description accurately reflects his major duties. However, he believes that he has not been given sufficient credit for his skills, knowledges, and abilities in masonry and insulation. In regard to his masonry work, he states that he has the ability/skill to cut, shape and finish stone. He also states he has previously completed and still has the skills to lay rubble, cut stone sorted by size and shape, and lay it so it provides strength and a good-looking appearance. He says that if requested, he could and would complete these assignments. Similarly, he points out that he can also reline boilers and rebuild furnace walls with firebrick and insulation brick using fire resistant mortar and fire clay, if the facility required it, or he could construct smokestacks and chimneys, insuring that the proper taper is obtained, though he has not been required to do this in his present job.

He stresses that as an Insulator he has been responsible for monitoring the work of others on team projects and providing technical guidance to lower graded employees in placing insulation. He feels that this meets the responsibility required at the WG-10 level.

JOB INFORMATION

The appellant is one of 11 employees in the Building Maintenance Shop of the Engineering Service which includes a WS-9 Maintenance Mechanic Supervisor, 3 WG-10 Maintenance Mechanics, 5 WG-9 Painters, a WG-9 Locksmith, and the appellant. His duties chiefly cover three separate trades: masonry, insulation, and plastering, which respectively demand about 50 percent, 30 percent, and 20 percent of his time by his estimate. The masonry portion of his duties requires that he maintain, repair, alter, and construct surfaces and structures built of various kinds of stone, brick, and block, laying out the work in the most appropriate manner. He also installs ceramic tile and block and has occasionally finished concrete, though cement finishing, still another trade, is seldom assigned.

His job description states that as an insulator he develops patterns and lays out, cuts, forms, joins, assembles and installs all kinds of insulation on turbines, air ducts, heaters, generators, pumps, evaporators, refrigeration units, boilers and other systems, that he performs encapsulation of asbestos insulation and small asbestos removals, and that he is knowledgeable in the areas of fireproofing and sound proofing and the use of insulation tools.

His job description also states that he is expected to do all types of plastering work, that he does repairs as well as new installations, installs plaster and stucco walls with metal lathe and gypsum board, that he performs a variety of plaster work such as running baseboards, molding, cornices, and applying special finishes, that he applies new plaster and finishes in a manner that blends in with the surrounding area, applies tape to joints between wall board so that the surface is even, that he must be familiar with the properties of and be able to mix all types of plastering materials such as base coat gypsum, lime plaster, concrete bonding plaster, and finishing plaster, that he must be able to use all of the tools associated with the plastering trade, such as angle trowels, floats screeds, daby, plasterers' hawk, and straight edges in order to obtain smooth finishes, and that he must also be able to use brushes, sponges, and other materials to obtain the proper texture.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Pay System Determination

A job is exempt from the General Schedule if its primary duty involves the performance of physical work that requires knowledge or experience of a trade, craft, or manual labor nature. The appellant's primary duty requires knowledge in several trades and consequently falls under the Federal Wage System (FWS).

Code and Title Determination

An FWS job is coded to the occupation that represents the best match between the content of the job and the definitions of the various occupations. Jobs requiring the performance of work in two or more occupations are coded to the occupation that is most important for recruitment, selection, placement, promotion, or reduction in force purposes. This is ordinarily the occupation having the

highest skill and knowledge requirements, as long as that occupation's duties are regular and recurring.

The appellant's main duties involve three distinct occupations, each of which has its own job grading standard. The WG-3603 Mason standard covers his duties involving the maintenance, repair, alteration, and construction of masonry structures of brick, block, stone, firebrick, and similar materials. The WG-3605 Plasterer standard covers his duties involving the application and finishing of plaster surfaces in the construction and repair of interior walls and ceilings and stucco exterior walls. The WG-3610 Insulator standard covers his duties involving the fabrication and installation of insulating materials to reduce heat loss or absorption, prevent moisture condensation, or attenuate sound levels.

As shown in the Grade Determination section of this decision, the appellant's highest graded duties encompass two distinct occupations, Mason and Plasterer, rather than a single occupation. The Maintenance Mechanic, WG-4749, standard covers such situations when the highest level of work is performed in two or more trades. The Maintenance Mechanic job code covers the maintenance and repair of grounds, exterior structures, buildings, and related fixtures and utilities, requiring the use of a variety of trade practices associated with occupations such as carpentry, masonry, plumbing, electrical, air conditioning, cement work, painting, and other related trades. Although not specifically mentioned in the Work Covered section of the standard, plastering and insulating are related trades covered by the WG-4749 job code. The prescribed title for WG-9 and higher work under this job code is *Maintenance Mechanic*.

Grade Determination

FWS work is graded based on the regular and recurring duties of the job that involve the highest skill and qualification requirements, even though the duties may not be performed most of the time. Duties not regularly performed, such as the appellant's occasional cement finishing (which typically is lower graded work than that which he already is credited with), or duties performed only in the absence of another employee, to meet emergency workloads, or for personal development are not considered. Work in two or more occupations is graded at the highest skill level required, but no extra credit is given for skill in more than one occupation.

The WG-4749 job grading standard shows how jobs in the WG-4749 occupation are graded. Work is not described narratively because most of the different combinations of work are already described in other job grading standards. The examples are intended to show some of the more common combinations of work. They demonstrate that jobs that combine duties of otherwise discrete trades are graded the same way as jobs that are not identified with a single occupation, but consist of work in separate occupations. Consequently, we have graded each of the discrete trades involved in the appellant's work by reference to the pertinent occupation's job grading standard in order to determine the appellant's highest grade work.

A job is graded as a whole against the level of demands found at differing grades. These demands are expressed in job grading standards as four factors: 1) skill and knowledge, 2) responsibility, 3) physical effort, and 4) working conditions. No single factor is considered by itself, but only in

relation to its impact on the other factors. The job is assigned to the grade that best represents the overall demands of the work.

MASONRY WORK

The Mason, WG-3603, standard is used to grade the appellant's brick, block, and stone work. The appellant states that he can perform certain kinds of masonry work found at the highest level of the Masonry job grading standard, but has not been requested to do so. His Service Chief notes that the kind of masonry work performed at the highest level is seldom if ever done because of modern boiler and air pollution technology. Whether a worker is capable of performing higher graded work is relevant only if such work is, in fact, assigned on a regular and recurring basis. Accordingly, our analysis considers only the job's regular and recurring assignments, rather than the appellant's capabilities.

Skill and Knowledge

This factor covers the nature and level of skill, knowledge, and mental application required to perform the work.

At the WG-8 level, Masonry Workers must have a basic knowledge of techniques and procedures involved in laying brick, block and stone in the construction of such items as partitions, walls, walkways, and fireplaces. They work with whole brick or block requiring the skill necessary to accurately line up courses that are horizontally and vertically true. They must be skilled in the use of hand and power tools associated with the trade and be able to mix mortar using the proper proportions of ingredients. In working with stone, they must be able to prepare the subsurface and place stone in proper position to ensure an even surface.

At the WG-10 level, Masons must have a comprehensive knowledge of techniques of brick, block and stone work. In addition to laying whole pieces, they must have the skill necessary to cut and shape block, brick, and stone and have the skill necessary to cut and shape brick in order to construct and repair corners as well as openings such as doors and windows. They are expected to perform decorative brick work through placement of brick of different colors to create various designs and patterns. In addition to stonework shown at the lower level, they must be able to cut, shape, and finish stone, lay rubble or cut stone in the repair or construction of walls, patios, and walkways, and sort stone by size and shape to achieve the required strength and appearance. Masons are expected to perform complex work such as smoke stacks or chimneys where they must lay materials in a circular pattern and also maintain a constant taper that results in designed characteristics of the decreasing diameter and increasing height as specified in a plan or blueprint.

The appellant is not required to exercise the highest level of skill and knowledge as is described at the WG-10 level. There is little decorative stone work associated with the job and there is no required construction of complex masonry structures such as circular chimneys. However, his work significantly exceeds that described at the WG-8 Masonry Worker level because he is required to cut brick and fit brick for corners and openings. Therefore, the knowledge and skill required by the appellant's job falls between the two described levels.

We evaluate this factor of the appellant's work at WG-9.

Responsibility

This factor covers the nature and degree of responsibility involved in the work, given its complexity and scope, the difficulty and frequency of judgments and decisions made, the supervisory controls, and the work instructions and technical guides used.

The appellant works in the Building Maintenance Shop and reports to a WS-9 Maintenance Mechanic Supervisor. The incumbent receives assignments from work order requests and his work is subject to spot checks. He is required to follow established safety procedures and may be required to train vocational rehabilitation students and upward mobility personnel and monitor their progress.

At the WG-8 level, a higher grade worker or supervisor assigns the work orally or through work orders. Masonry Workers select the proper tools and use materials called for by instructions. When working as members of a crew, they receive instructions from a higher graded worker. Their assignments are checked during progress and upon completion for accuracy and to ensure that the work meets standard trade practices.

At the WG-10 level, Masons receive assignments from the supervisor orally or through work orders. Masons review the work to be performed, interpret blueprints or sketches, and decide work method or processes best suited to complete the work. They perform the work independently, with little or no work direction. The finished work is spot-checked for adequacy and adherence to accepted trade practices. In decorative work, Masons receive assignments as to the end results desired and proceed independently in outlining patterns and designs, determining methods and procedures, computing materials and accomplishing assigned tasks.

The appellant's responsibility significantly exceeds the WG-8 level because his more complex assignments are made directly from work orders and there is no higher graded worker to plan work or provide in-process guidance. His responsibility does not meet the WG-10 level, which, in addition to increased independence, demands a corresponding increase in the difficulty of work. The appellant may work with a great deal of independence on assignments without a significant increase in responsibility, barring an increase in the complexity and scope of his assignments, which, though they significantly exceed WG-8, fall short of the full WG-10 level. Therefore, his responsibility also falls between the standard's two described levels.

We evaluate this factor of the appellant's work at WG-9.

Physical Effort

This factor assesses the physical effort involved in the work according to its nature, degree, frequency, and duration of exertion.

There is no difference in physical effort between the WG-8 and WG-10 level stated in the job grading standard. Masonry Workers and Masons both perform heavy lifting in carrying bricks, block, stone, mortar, cement, and sand. They are required to continually stand while working and must frequently climb ladders and scaffolds. The appellant's masonry work involves similar physical effort and, therefore, neither weakens nor strengthens the grade.

We evaluate this factor of the appellant's work at WG-9.

Working Conditions

This factor covers the usual hazards, physical hardships, and conditions to which workers are exposed. Exposure to unusually severe conditions (hazards, physical hardships, or working conditions, such as working with or in close proximity to virulent micro-organisms) is compensated by environmental pay differentials. Related demands on skill, knowledge, and responsibility are accounted for in the standard.

There is no difference in working conditions between the WG-8 and WG-10 level stated in the job grading standard. Masonry Workers and Masons both are exposed to a variety of weather conditions while outdoors. There is danger from falling as well as exposure to dust and dirt while mixing mortar and handling masonry materials. The appellant's masonry working conditions are the same as described in the standard and, therefore, neither weaken nor strengthen the grade.

We evaluate this factor of the appellant's work at WG-9.

Masonry Work Grade Determination

The appellant's work equates to the WG-9 level on all four factors. Consequently, the overall grade of his masonry duties is WG-9.

PLASTER WORK

The Plasterer, WG-3605, standard is used to grade the appellant's work with plaster, stucco, gypsum, etc. Telephone discussions with the appellant and his supervisor provided current information on the appellant's duties and highlighted inaccuracies in the appellant's job description. The job description indicates that he does a variety of plastering including running baseboards, moldings and cornices. Neither he nor his supervisor could think of an instance where he has ever done this work and could not think of an instance where he might do so. For this reason such tasks were not considered in our decision.

Skill and Knowledge

At the WG-9 level, Plasterers must have a thorough knowledge of plastering trade practices and must be skilled in applying work methods and techniques. They must have skill in applying scratch, brown, and finish coats and the ability to produce a smooth surface with the proper texture. Plasterers at this level must also be skilled at more exacting work such as running baseboards, moldings, cornices, and applying special finishes. When repairing or patching, They must know how to prepare the damaged area to insure that new plaster will adhere and bring to a finish that blends with the adjoining area.

They must have skill in the use of the tools of the plastering trade, must be familiar with the properties of and be able to mix all types of plastering materials. They must also be able to install or replace the lath as well as determine the type of lath to be used.

The skill and knowledge required in the appellant's job meets the requirements at the WG-9 level because his work includes the more exacting plastering such as applying special finishes and overhead

and angular plastering. He is required to do all types of plastering work, both new and repairs rendering a finish that matches that used throughout the facility. He is required to mix all types of plastering materials and be proficient in the use of all of the tools of the Plasterer's trade. We evaluate this factor of the appellant's work at WG-9.

Responsibility

At the WG-9 level, Plasterers receive assignments from the supervisor either orally or through work orders. They review work to be completed, interpret sketches and decide work methods or processes best suited to complete the job. They independently select tools and materials and receive little or no review during progress of the plastering process. The supervisor may check to ensure the adequacy and appearance of the final job.

The appellant's job meets the requirements established at the WG-9 level because he receives his assignments through work orders and is independently responsible for completing the assigned plastering work with only a final review by the supervisor.

We evaluate this factor of the appellant's work at WG-9.

Physical Effort

WG-9 plastering work involves continual standing, walking, climbing, and bending. Occasionally, Plasterers are required to lift up to 100 pounds while carrying mortar, scaffolds, ladders, and other materials. The physical requirements involved in the appellant's plastering work are the same as those described in the standard.

We evaluate this factor of the appellant's work at WG-9.

Working Conditions

WG-9 Plasterers are frequently exposed to dust and dirt while mixing mortar and plastering. They may be required to work outdoors and work from ladders and scaffolds. The appellant's working conditions are the same as those described at the WG-9 level.

We evaluate this factor of the appellant's work at WG-9.

Plaster Work Grade Determination

The appellant's work equates to the WG-9 level on all four factors. Consequently, the overall grade of his plastering duties is WG-9.

INSULATOR WORK

The Insulator, WG-3610, standard is used to grade the appellant's fabrication and installation of insulating materials. His job description indicates that he installs all kinds of insulation on turbines, air ducts, heaters, generators, pumps, evaporators, refrigeration units, boilers, and other systems. Our discussions revealed this type of work is not a regular part of his duties and only one instance was mentioned in our telephone interviews where such work was actually done. Typically the appellant insulates less complex objects than given in his job description, such as pipes and valves where he

uses materials to match existing insulating materials on adjoining surfaces. Therefore, our analysis addresses only his regular and recurring insulating assignments.

Although he indicated that he supervised a crew of lower graded workers performing insulating work, our discussions revealed that the circumstances in which this occurred related to pre-inspection work where there was a need to expeditiously apply fireproofing material in areas surrounding walls that had been penetrated to install or modify piping. Painters from the organization were temporarily assigned to perform these additional duties. The appellant says that he has monitored the insulation work of others and provided technical guidance to lower graded employees. However, there are no lower graded insulation workers assigned to any of the shops at the Medical Center and his occasional direction of workers who lend assistance on large or emergency projects is not a regular part of his job and thus excluded from consideration.

Skill and Knowledge

WG-8 Insulation Workers must have the ability to measure the dimensions of pipes, ducts, and other objects and cut, form, and install insulating materials on items with flat, square, or cylindrical surfaces and regular curves. They must be able to fill cracks and smooth rough spots with cement and trowel and apply fiberglass cloth or other fabric to cover the insulation using cement, needle and twine, or copper wire. At this level, they must apply a working knowledge of the general purposes and properties of insulating plastics, fiberglass, and other materials. WG-8 work requires a knowledge of arithmetic to perform surface measurements with rules and calipers as well as good eye and hand coordination to perform the processes of cutting, lacing, sewing, and trowel application.

WG-10 Insulators must develop patterns and lay out, cut, form, join, assemble and install materials on systems such as turbines, air ducts, heaters, generators, pumps, evaporators, refrigeration units, boilers, and a variety of one-of-a-kind enclosures that have straight, curved, and irregular shapes. WG-10 Insulators must plan and lay out the materials using parallel and radial line development and the principals of triangulation to prepare patterns, templates, and sketches of the items to be covered. They use a variety of blueprints, drawings, and other specifications to construct the insulating forms into the desired shapes, allowing for seams, joints, and shrinkage. At this level, Insulators independently select the materials and equipment to be used.

WG-10 Insulators evaluate the area to be insulated considering the size, shape, temperature, accessibility, environment, and physical appearance of the items or systems to be insulated. They must perform more complex mathematical calculations than performed at the WG-8 level to measure and identify the precise dimensions of irregular and unique structures using triangulation to transfer the shapes and measures to paper. At this level, Insulators must have the skill to read and interpret blueprints, specifications, and project plans to identify the dimensional characteristics of the items to be insulated. They must develop work procedures and instructions for lower graded workers and monitor their performance of work assignments. Insulators at this level must be able to calculate and perform a variety of linear, angular, cubic and circular measurements and compute such factors as thermal conductivity and sound absorbency to select the proper type and amount of insulation required to complete the tasks. WG-10 Insulators perform more difficult procedures than do WG-8 Insulator Workers such as using blowers to apply sound or heat insulation in confined spaces and

fabricating molded sections of insulation to enclose unique or unusual structures. They construct insulation boxes to cover groups of piping elements and enclosed fittings, flanges, or valves and install double layers of insulation on turbines and high pressure steam lines, insuring that the stagger joints overlap properly.

WG-10 Insulators must be skilled in evaluating damaged or inadequate insulation portrayed by sound, appearance, or temperature. They must know how to plan and lay out as well as repair and modify projects to insure uniform finish, stability, and continuity of insulation qualities.

The appellant does not perform duties characteristic of the skill and knowledge of the WG-10 level of the standard. His work is generally limited to repairing damaged insulation on existing piping with limited complexity. His selection of materials is limited to matching the properties of previously applied insulation or adjacent materials. He does not perform complex linear or cubic calculations nor does he calculate thermal loss or gain factors in making insulating material selections. When faced with a situation in which existing materials do not dictate the selection of materials, he relies on vendors to recommend the appropriate materials. He does not normally direct a crew of lower graded workers nor does he develop templates and construct complex enclosure devices to insulate the most complex groups of valves, pipes or fittings.

The appellant does perform duties characteristic of the skill and knowledge of the WG-8 level. He generally insulates pipes, valves, and fittings of a less complex nature, selecting from insulating materials which match those previously applied or immediately adjacent to the area being insulated.

We evaluate this factor of the appellant's work at WG-8.

Responsibility

WG-8 Insulating Workers receive clear-cut work orders and instructions from a supervisor or higher graded worker. They apply predetermined methods, materials, and installation techniques in accordance with clearly defined drawings or templates that are provided in work orders and instructions. Their work is spot checked by the supervisor or higher graded worker for adequacy, appearance, and correct use of materials.

WG-10 Insulators work from written or oral instructions, blueprints, sketches, or personal inspection of items to be insulated. They independently plan and lay out work or develop guidance and procedures for others to follow. They develop patterns or templates and select, apply, or prescribe methods, materials, tools, and equipment for each project. At this level, Insulators are responsible for monitoring the work of others on team projects and providing guidance to lower graded workers. Work is spot checked by the supervisor for workmanship and compliance with specifications.

The appellant's independence exceeds the WG-8 level in the manner in which he receives work orders. He receives most of his assignments through work orders which are very general in nature and accomplishes the work based on his personal inspection of the area to be insulated. However, blueprints, drawings, or templates are not provided because the complexity of the assigned work makes the nature of work to be completed self evident. He is not responsible for any work greater

in complexity than that found at the WG-8 level. Given the limited complexity of his insulating assignments, his responsibility does not significantly exceed the WG-8 level.

We evaluate this factor of the appellant's work at WG-8.

Physical Effort

Insulating work requires moderate physical exertion and involves prolonged standing, and occasional crawling bending, stooping, and reaching. Work is often done in cramped and awkward jobs with continuous movement of arms and hands while fitting and installing materials. Tasks include working from ladders and frequently lifting, carrying, and otherwise handling materials and tools weighing up to 50 pounds.

The physical effort involved in the appellant's insulating work is as described in the standard for Insulator Worker. There is no difference in physical effort between the WG-8 and WG-10 level stated in the standard. Workers at both levels perform moderate lifting, continually stand while working, and must frequently climb ladders and scaffolds. Therefore, the physical effort involved in the appellant's insulating work neither weakens nor strengthens the grade.

We evaluate this factor of the appellant's work at WG-8.

Working Conditions

Insulating work is usually performed inside well lighted and ventilated locations or outside in good working conditions. The work may occasionally be performed in extreme cold or heat while working in enclosed machinery spaces. There are also instances when damp, noisy, and dirty conditions prevail. The workers also work from ladders, staging, or elevated platforms. Workers may be subject to cuts, abrasions, and burns while using tools of the trade. Installation and removal of insulation often creates airborne dust particles which require the wearing of respiratory safety devices or other protective apparel.

There is no difference in working conditions between the WG-8 and WG-10 level stated in the job grading standard. Insulator Workers and Insulators both are exposed to a variety of working conditions. There is danger from falling as well as exposure to dust and dirt while handling insulating materials. The appellant faces these same conditions and is often exposed to dust and dirt created by the insulating material used and he is required to use prescribed safety equipment and procedures to insure his personal safety. Therefore, working conditions neither weaken nor strengthen the grade.

We evaluate this factor of the appellant's work at WG-8.

Insulating Work Grade Determination

The appellant's work equates to the WG-8 level on all four factors. Consequently, the overall grade of his insulating duties is WG-8.

DECISION

WG-9 Maintenance Mechanics perform a variety of tasks involved in the upkeep of buildings, grounds and related structures, fixtures, and utilities. Typical work assignments include visual examination and operational tests to determine the need for, and the performance of, repair work on a level of difficulty and responsibility comparable to WG-9 Painters, Plumbers, and Carpenters. Similarly, the appellant's job involves work typical of WG-9 Masonry Workers and Plasterers. His job has no regular and recurring higher graded duties, but does entail lower graded WG-8 Insulator Worker duties. The job's most demanding physical requirements and working conditions are fully credited at the WG-9 level. Consequently, the job is properly graded as Maintenance Mechanic, WG-4749-9.