

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

San Francisco Oversight Division
120 Howard Street, Room 760
San Francisco, CA 94105-0001

Classification Appeal Decision
Under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code

Appellants: [Names of appellants]

Agency classification: Meteorologist
GS-1340-12

Organization: [The appellants' organization]
Weather Forecast Office
National Weather Service
National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

OPM decision: Meteorologist
GS-1340-12

OPM decision number: C-1340-12-01

Carlos A. Torrico
Classification Appeals Officer

January 14, 2002
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:

Appellants:

[Name and address of the appellants' representative]

Agency:

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Introduction

On March 27, 2001, the San Francisco Oversight Division, of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted classification appeals from [the appellants]. On April 20, 2001, the Division received the agency's administrative report. Subsequently, OPM was informed by the agency that effective July 1, 2001, [name of one of the appellants] was promoted to a different position in another National Weather Service region and is no longer assigned to the appealed position. Because employees can only appeal the position to which they are officially assigned, we have removed [name of the appellant] from this appeal. At the request of the appellants' representative, the appeals were suspended from May 23, 2001 to July 9, 2001, pending the outcome of an arbitrator's decision. After receiving the decision, the representative requested that OPM continue with the adjudication of the appeals. All of the appellants are assigned to the same standardized position description (PD) currently classified as Meteorologist, GS-1340-12. However, they believe that their positions should be graded at the GS-13 level. They work at the [name and location of the appellants' organization] Weather Forecast Office (WFO), National Weather Service (NWS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Department of Commerce. We have accepted and decided their appeals under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.), and are issuing one decision covering all of the appellants.

General issues

This appeal decision is based on a careful review of all information submitted by the appellants and their agency. In addition, to help decide the appeal, an Oversight Division representative conducted separate telephone interviews with six of the appellants and their supervisor. Both the appellants and their supervisor have certified to the accuracy of the appellants' official position description (PD) [number]. However, the appellants believe the PD should also include their duties for oversight and/or preparation of specific marine forecasts and charts. We have considered those duties in our review of the positions.

The appellants, through their representative, make several statements comparing their work to higher graded positions at other National Weather Service offices and centers. By law, we must classify positions solely by comparing their duties and responsibilities to OPM classification standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellants' positions to others as a basis for deciding their appeals.

The appellants' representative cites a 1978 U.S. Civil Service Commission (CSC) advisory upgrading forecasters at several Weather Service field offices, including [the appellants' duty station]. The advisory was based on interpretation and extension of the grading criteria contained in the standard for the Meteorology Series, GS-1340, issued in February 1972. However, that standard has been replaced by the Job Family Standard (JFS) for Professional Physical Science Work, GS-1300P, reissued in HRCD 7, dated July 1999. Because of the change in standards, the 1978 advisory and interpretive guidance is no longer in effect.

Position information

The appellants (forecasters) are responsible for devising and disseminating a variety of weather forecast products. The forecasts, alerts, and warnings cover three basic program areas: public service forecasts, aviation forecasts, and marine forecasts. The appellants also assist the senior forecasters and/or Meteorologist-in-Charge (MIC) when dealing with the NWS River Forecast Center and State, local, and Federal emergency management offices. The appellants work within teams with other meteorologist(s), hydrologists, and hydro-meteorological technicians. In addition to those outside contacts already mentioned, they also coordinate forecasts and warnings with neighboring National Weather Service offices and centers to fully account for the impact of broader weather patterns and systems.

The work of forecasters assigned to the [appellants' duty station] WFO is complicated by the terrain, affect of offshore and high seas weather systems, arctic air and resulting icing conditions, and the impact of hurricanes and other weather systems that originate outside the geographic area. In addition, marine forecasting is especially complicated by the close proximity of two large bodies of water [their names]. Weather conditions change frequently, requiring the use of past experience to augment computer models or existing theory, and to develop accurate and timely forecasts.

While the appellants are provided with a forecasting model by the senior forecaster for each shift, they must rely on data sources that are incomplete and sometimes conflicting when applying the model. For example, in marine forecasts the actual weather observations come mainly from ships situated closer to land rather than further out to sea, thus leaving "gaps" in the data. Likewise, the Doppler radar coverage is not contiguous, and the passage of systems and weather conditions across the "spaces" between coverage is not tracked. Because of this, the appellants must be able to accurately extrapolate or infer predictions based on what information is available, even if incomplete.

The results of our interviews, the appellants' PD, and other material of record provide more information on their duties and responsibilities.

Series, title, and standard determination

The agency classified the appellants' positions in the Meteorology Series, GS-1340, titling the positions as Meteorologist according to the instructions in the JFS for Professional Physical Science Work, GS-1300P. The appellants do not disagree with the agency's title and series determination, and we concur. Like positions classified in the GS-1340 series, the appellants' positions involve professional work in Meteorology, the science concerned with the earth's atmospheric envelope and its processes. The work includes basic and applied research into conditions and phenomena of the atmosphere; the collection, analysis, evaluation, and interpretation of meteorological data to predict weather and determine climatological conditions for specific geographical areas; the development of new or the improvement of existing meteorological theory; and the development or improvement of meteorological methods, techniques, and instruments. The GS-1300P JFS contains appropriate grading criteria to evaluate the appellants' duties, which are addressed below.

Grade determination

Application of the GS-1300P JFS

The grading criteria contained in the GS-1300P JFS describe the nature of assignments and level of responsibility at each grade, along with qualification requirements. Positions are graded by comparing them to descriptive material provided for each grade level. The criteria include appropriate language from the law, supplemented by more specific material, including some occupation-specific work illustrations.

As described beginning on page 20 of the GS-1300P standard, assignments of GS-12 level meteorologists involve planning, executing, and reporting on work that involves extensive modification and adaptation of standard procedures, methods, and techniques, and development of totally new methods and techniques to address problems for which guidelines or precedents are not substantially applicable. Assignments at this level include considerable breadth, diversity, and intensity; varied complex features; and novel or obscure problems.

The appellants' work favorably compares to the GS-12 level. The forecasters are responsible for the development and dissemination of weather forecast information to a variety of customers (i.e., general public, marine, and aviation forecasts), as well as meteorological assistance to the NWS River Forecast Center. Their work closely matches the GS-12 level work illustration described in the standard where the meteorologist prepares and issues public service forecasts and provides guidance, assistance, and complete theoretical explanations for particular forecast situations to television and radio stations, the general public, special user interests, and related weather service activities. Similar to the appellants, the GS-12 level meteorologist receives assignments in broad, general terms, consults the supervisor (in their case the senior forecaster or MIC) only on problems of a particularly difficult or unusual nature, and has work reviewed for adequacy of results and overall program requirements.

The nature of work described at the GS-13 level (page 24) in the GS-1300P standard involves work for which technical problem definitions, methods, and/or data are highly incomplete, controversial, or uncertain. Scientists at that level typically serve as senior experts in that their work often involves consultation with other senior level scientists and program specialists, where the GS-13 is recognized as the technical expert. At this level the scientist is expected to represent the organization and/or program in defending and persuading other groups to accept a particularly controversial or resource-consuming recommendation or prediction. Because these duties and responsibilities are assigned to the senior forecaster in the appellants' organization, the appellants are not assigned the work required to meet the GS-13 level.

By application of the grading criteria in the GS-1300P JFS, the appellants' duties and responsibilities equate to the GS-12 level.

Decision

The appellants' positions are properly classified as Meteorologist, GS-1340-12.