



Tips and Tidbits
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Question: Why are wage surveys conducted? What precipitated this requirement?

Wage surveys are conducted to determine the prevailing rate of federal blue-collar workers and to ensure that their pay is comparable to private sector rates within their designated local wage areas. Wage areas, defined by OPM, take factors such as commuting patterns, trading and commerce patterns, geographical features of the area, and Metropolitan Statistical Area definitions under consideration.

Prior to 1965, Federal agencies had the authority to determine the rate of pay (prevailing rate) and establish their own wage area boundaries. This resulted in pay inequities for Federal blue-collar workers. In 1965, the President ordered Federal agencies to coordinate their wage setting activities so that Federal blue-collar employee wages be maintained in accordance with the prevailing rate of pay for comparable levels of work in the private sector within a local wage area. The Civil Service Commission was designated the lead agency to oversee the wage setting activities and established the National Wage Policy Committee, made up of heads of major employing agencies and Federal employee unions. The National Wage Policy Committee's mission was to seek ways to combine separate agency pay systems. In 1972, the Federal Wage System (FWS) was established. Since 1972, the Commission, now known as the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), is responsible for overseeing the administration of the FWS.

OPM has identified Department of Defense (DoD) as the "lead" agency responsible for conducting wage surveys, analyzing the data, and issuing wage schedules. The Defense Civilian Personnel Management Service, Wage and Salary Division (DCPMS-WSD) was established to carry out DoD statutory principles by conducting annual wage surveys in each wage area to collect wage data from private sector establishments. There are two types of surveys, full scale wage surveys which take place every two years and wage change surveys which take place during the alternate years of the full scale survey.

The DoD establishes local wage survey committees (LWSC) in each of the wage areas to conduct the surveys. The LWSC holds a public hearing prior to the full-scale survey to gather information from activities with concerns about the survey criteria which consists of the area definition, industries, private industrial establishments, minimum size, and jobs to be surveyed. The LWSC sends a report with recommendations of the public hearing to the DoD who, after reviewing the reports, will develop the survey specifications. The DoD then sends a list of establishments to be surveyed to the LWSC who then provides this information to the data collectors, which consist of one local FWS employee and one Federal employee representing management. During a full-scale survey, the data collectors visit the establishments to obtain the needed information. The information gathered during the survey consists of: (1) general

information such as merit or performance increases, overtime, cost of living increases, environmental pay, and bonuses; and (2) for each job matched, a description for duties, the number of employees, rate of pay, and their step rates. The survey includes only those jobs normally related to blue collar occupations that are commonly found in both industry and government. The LWSC reviews the data for accuracy and completeness and forwards to the lead agency, who also review the data. After reviewing all the information, recommendations, and analyzing the data, DoD establishes a wage schedule.

Fort Benning is in the Columbus, Georgia Wage Area which consists of 29 counties in Georgia (Chattahoochee and the Columbus Consolidated Government) and Alabama (Autauga, Elmore, Lee, Macon, Montgomery, and Russell). The area of application also includes counties in Georgia (Harris, Marion, Quitman, Schley, Stewart, Talbot, Taylor, Troup, and Webster) and Alabama (Bullock, Butler, Chambers, Coosa, Crenshaw, Dallas, Lowndes, Pike, Tallapoosa, and Wilcox).

The survey includes establishments in five major industries: manufacturing, transportation, communications, public utilities, and wholesale trade. In order to participate in the wage survey an establishment must have at least 50 employees; be within the designated counties listed above; and, be in one the major industries [listed above]. Participation in the wage survey by establishments is strictly voluntary; however, those that do participate help to ensure the Federal Government is competing fairly in the labor market by paying rates comparable to the local area.

The purpose of the “wage change survey” is to update wage data obtained during the full-scale survey. Normally, the same committee members telephonically contact the industries to see if any of the previously collected data has changed. The information collected from the industries is documented and forwarded to the DCPMS-WSD who assists DoD in establishing a new wage schedule.

The Columbus, Georgia wage surveys are always scheduled during the month of August at Fort Benning. The Government has 45 working days to put the FWS pay adjustments into effect after the wage survey begins. Wage schedules are effective the first pay period after the 45 day period expires.

For additional information please contact your servicing Human Resources Specialist.

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