

October 26, 2023

The Honorable City Council
c/o Office of the City Clerk
Room 395, City Hall
Mail Stop 160

Honorable Members:

Subject: Approval of Salary Setting and Salary Adjustment for Helicopter Pilot and Chief Helicopter Pilot Assigned to Human External Cargo Crews

This letter recommends the City Council approve the salary setting for a proposed new Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) Duties Description Record (DDR) for the classification of Helicopter Pilot (HP), Class Code 3560, represented by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), Local 18, under the Operating, Maintenance and Service Unit. Additionally, LADWP requests approval of proposed salary adjustments for the Chief Helicopter Pilot (CHP) DDRs, Class Code 3562, represented by the Management Employees Association, who are assigned duties that apply the Human External Cargo (HEC) methods and techniques associated with transmission line construction, maintenance, and repair work. This approval is consistent with the bargaining instructions received and salary adjustment request approved by the Executive Employee Relations Committee (EERC) at its meeting on October 13, 2023.

Background

HEC involves the use of a helicopter to aerially transport line workers to perform transmission construction, maintenance, and repair work. Specialized harnessing equipment and cables secure the line worker to the helicopter, and the line worker is lifted and flown to the transmission tower for access and work. This method minimizes or eliminates the need to climb transmission towers and places the line worker at the exact location of the electrical work to be performed with greater safety and less fatigue.

In 2017, the EERC approved the implementation of a daily rate premium of 15 percent to employees in the classifications of Electric Distribution Mechanic, Line Maintenance Assistant, Electric Distribution Mechanic Supervisor, HP, and CHP, to be received only on the days that the employees of the aforementioned classifications perform HEC work.

Subsequently, LADWP certified 37 participants of the LADWP Overhead Transmission HEC Program on January 24, 2019, and initiated a pilot program utilizing HEC in its projects, starting off with small jobs, gradually increasing in scope and complexity. LADWP has now passed its infancy stage in the utilization of HEC workers and has successfully implemented a rapidly growing standardized HEC program.

The number of jobs requiring HEC methods and new opportunities in the utilization of HEC HPs is growing at a rate higher than initially anticipated in 2017, as the application of HEC procedures becomes an increasingly essential part of the job duties of a HP within LADWP. The HEC method is especially beneficial when tower locations become inaccessible due to weather, hard terrain, or environmental issues. The increasing number of locations with accessibility obstacles due to natural disasters or regulatory restrictions necessitates the utilization of HEC methods more than ever before.

Recruitment and Retention

The 2017 daily premium implemented by LADWP for classifications engaged in HEC activities served as an incentive for employees to join a HEC crew who would have otherwise not been interested in the additional duties and responsibilities. The daily premium compensation proved to be an effective tool in the recruitment of all targeted classifications, except for HPs, the most instrumental classification in the formulation of HEC crews involved with transmission related work. Specifically, only three (3) out of a total of six (6) LADWP HPs opted to perform HEC operations. The LADWP goal was to have all six (6) current incumbents certified and trained in HEC techniques in order to efficiently address operational needs. The current shortage of HEC trained and certified HPs impacts LADWP's ability to formulate the desired number of HEC crews for current and future projects in support of its HEC-certified Overhead Transmission workforce, which is steadily increasing.

High risk conditions, continuous training requirements, and the increased level of responsibility have made HEC crew duties less desirable to existing LADWP HPs. As an example:

- The HEC pilot is responsible for flying with little to no margin of error at all times to avoid injury or death to the line workers harnessed below. During a HEC operation, the pilot is also responsible for the lives of workers suspended below the helicopter. Working around energized and de-energized non-grounded lines, the slightest error in maneuvering may result in severe injury or death.
- HEC pilots must maintain their proficiency and readiness to perform HEC operations at all times. Because this is a perishable skill, HEC pilots must

- constantly practice HEC techniques and are required to attend frequent related training.
- HEC operations pose a higher level of exposure to risk than any other type of civil helicopter operations including police, fire, and Emergency Medical Services operations due to the absence of the helicopter's autorotation landing capability. Unlike other type of civil helicopter operations, HEC operations are conducted outside of the capability of the helicopter to perform an autorotation landing in case of a mechanical failure due to the low flying altitude and the presence of power lines between the helicopter and the ground. HEC pilots are exposed to this type of high-risk condition for extended periods of time, often up to six (6) hours per day.

The aforementioned factors coupled with the competition with other utilities over a shortage of qualified candidates pose a recruitment challenge for future hiring and retention of HEC pilots. The following are just several recruitment challenges being faced:

- HEC operations are conducted utilizing vertical reference longline techniques. Vertical reference occurs when the pilot flies the helicopter by looking down at the ground at visual cues rather than looking at the horizon the way all pilots are trained. This type of flying can be equated to driving a car with your head sideways. Not all pilots have the aptitude for vertical reference as it is a specialized skill. Training to develop this skill often requires hundreds or thousands of hours of longline practice. A few pilots can learn the skills very quickly, while others may never be able to do so.
- HPs with HEC power line experience are extremely rare. According to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), in 2018 there were 15,033 licensed HPs in the United States. Although the exact number is not known, industry professionals estimate the number of pilots who are experienced in HEC power line operations to be under 100 (0.0067 percent of all FAA licensed HPs).
- The pool of pilots with HEC experience will predominantly come from the small number of helicopter contractors who perform this type of work. These companies typically offer an attractive schedule such as a 21-day on-duty/ 21-day off duty schedule, and the ability to commute from anywhere in the country, or even outside the United States.

- During a past administration of the examination for HP, an eligible list with 25 candidates was established, with only one (1) of them having HEC power line experience.
- HPs utilizing HEC methods in other utility companies such as Southern California Edison Air Operations receive a maximum hourly rate of \$101.75 as compared to LADWP pilots who receive \$74.85 at top step. This is currently 26.44 percent greater than LADWP top step HP pay.

Unless HP pay scales are increased, recruitment of qualified pilots capable of HEC operations will be even more of a challenge, particularly considering the high cost of living in the Greater Los Angeles Area, as compared with the low cost of living enjoyed by employees of other utilities. The establishment of the proposed DDR with the increased salary would standardize consistent usage of HEC, provide incentive for career growth, and ensure a consistent supply of trained and certified HP.

With the increase in pay for the HPs performing HEC duties, there will also be an issue of compaction with the CHP "B" position, which will then cause a compaction issue for the CHP "A" position. Additionally, even when the CHPs are not directly flying a HEC mission, they have responsibilities that are specific to HEC missions.

- CHPs must individually evaluate each mission before accepting it to determine if it meets minimum flight safety requirements relative to HEC work. This includes considering the topography in the area where HEC work will be conducted, potential FAA flight restrictions, aerial obstacles, environmental conditions including weather considerations, and other hazards that may not be readily apparent.
- The CHPs must also draft logistics plans in advance of dispatching pilots to a HEC assignment. This includes, but is not limited to, arranging for Jet-A fuel support for the duration of the mission, onsite aircraft maintenance support, staging of the aircraft near the work site, and lodging for the Fleet and Aviation Services team members who will support the mission. The CHPs are responsible to identify and mitigate safety risks for their subordinate HPs and to develop a mission specific emergency action plan.
- All of these responsibilities require the CHPs to have a working knowledge of HEC missions and to commit a significant portion of their work week to HEC mission planning and oversight.

Salary Proposal

LADWP engaged in the meet-and-confer process with IBEW, Local 18, and have mutually agreed on the need for developing a second HPs' DDR, which establishes a consistent and pensionable 15 percent salary increase over the current DDR salary for those certified and regularly performing HEC duties.

Providing premium compensation for performing duties in conjunction with HEC methods is common within the utility industry, and LADWP must make the compensation competitive in order to attract future HEC-qualified candidates, to encourage non-HEC pilots to take on this additional responsibility, and to retain existing HEC pilots.

Listed below is the summary of the current and proposed HP and CHP salaries at the top step:

Classification / Duties Description Record No.	Current		Proposed		New Salary Range
	Monthly Salary*	Annual Salary*	Monthly Salary*	Annual Salary*	
Helicopter Pilot 'A' New DDR	N/A	N/A	\$14,979.66	\$179,755.92	6929
Helicopter Pilot "B" 94-35010	\$13,023.90	\$156,286.80	N/A	N/A	N/A

*Salaries are based on the top salary step (Step 5) of the Operating, Maintenance and Service Unit Memoranda of Understanding for the October 1, 2023 Cost-of-Living Adjustment.

Classification / Duties Description Record No.	Current		Proposed		New Salary Range
	Monthly Salary*	Annual Salary*	Monthly Salary*	Annual Salary*	
Chief Helicopter Pilot 'A' 95-35621	\$16,215.06	\$194,580.72	\$18,647.58	\$223,770.96	8626
Chief Helicopter Pilot 95-35620	\$15,355.50	\$184,266.00	\$17,662.74	\$211,952.88	8170

*Salaries are based on the top salary step (Step 5) of the Management Employees Unit Memoranda of Understanding for the October 1, 2023 Cost-of-Living Adjustment.

The proposed salary increase excludes any premiums, bonuses, or working condition differentials. The proposed new salary and salary adjustments will become effective upon final City Council approval.

Fiscal Impact

There is no fiscal impact to the City's General Fund. There are currently five (5) HPs and two (2) CHPs within LADWP. The annual financial impact for HP would be \$117,345.6 (5 x \$23,469.12), and the annual financial impact for the CHP would be \$56,877.12 (1 x \$29,190.24 and 1 x \$27,686.88) assuming all current HPs opt to join the LADWP HEC crews.

Although there will be a direct increase in the compensation of HEC HPs, LADWP anticipates to offset such increases, and in fact experience significant overall savings, due to the reduced number of labor hours spent on certain transmission projects, up to 30 percent for any given HEC job. Covering LADWP's vast area would take hundreds of trucks and ground crews, but a fleet of four (4) helicopters would allow LADWP to be far more efficient with its resources.

Recommendation

LADWP respectfully requests approval from the City Council relative to the proposed salaries summarized above.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Mr. Thomas T. Simonovski, Director of Labor Relations, at (213) 367-1951.

Sincerely,



Martin L. Adams
General Manager and Chief Engineer

MLA:tts:js

c: Mr. Matthew W. Szabo, City Administrative Officer
Mr. Paul A. Girard, Employee Relations Chief
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