



Some Arsenal workers will get special pay bump next year

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White-collar workers on the Rock Island Arsenal are in line for a special pay raise at the beginning of the year. The federal government has approved designating the Quad-City area for "locality pay," a designation that seeks to bring public-sector salaries in line with those in the private sector for comparable work.

The Obama administration announced last month that it would create 13 new pay zones, including in the Quad-Cities.

The amount of pay increase that workers on the Arsenal will get won't be known until later this year.

Steve Beck, president of the American Federation of Government Employees, Local 15, estimated 2,500 Arsenal workers will be affected. He said the union's headquarters estimated the locality raises on the island will amount to between 0.5 percent and 1 percent. He said that was largely based on examining locality pay adjustments in the Huntsville, Ala., area.

"It's nice to get a raise," Beck said, but he added it would be offset by insurance premium increases. The locality raises will be in addition to a 1 percent raise for all workers.

The locality pay boost will not affect wage grade employees, which include most of those who work at the Joint Manufacturing and Technology Center, union officials say. The change applies only to people who are on the government's General Schedule pay system. It also does not affect certain senior-level federal employees.

Nationwide, the government says, 102,000 people will see pay raises as a result of the new locality zones and the addition of counties to several of the 34 existing pay zones.

Those parts of the country that aren't in specially designated locality zones are grouped in a zone that is called "rest of the U.S." That category is the lowest-paying of all the locality zones. Until this change, that had included Arsenal workers.

There has been a wide-ranging debate over whether federal employees are overpaid or underpaid. The libertarian Cato Institute published a study in October that said, on average, public-sector workers have a wage of \$84,153, compared with an average of \$56,350 in the private sector.

But the Federal Salary Council, the advisory group that recommended the addition of new locality pay zones, has estimated that federal workers doing the same jobs as those in the private sector are underpaid by approximately 35 percent.

In 2012, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said it analyzed data from 2005 to 2010 and found that wages varied greatly depending on educational attainment.

It said that public-sector workers with no more than a high school diploma earned, on average, 21 percent more per hour than a person in the private sector with the same level of education. Those with bachelor degrees in the public sector, about a third of the federal workforce, earned about the same as those in the private sector. Federal workers with doctorate or professional degrees earned 23 percent less per hour than similar workers in the private sector, the CBO said.

Non-wage benefits for federal workers, on average, cost 48 percent more per hour than those in similar situations in the private sector, the CBO said.