

LOCATION?

Will you have to relocate?

The federal government is the most widespread employer in this country. A position could be open in a geographic area that is pleasing to you. At some point, you will need to decide whether your position or its location is more important.

If you have a family, you may have to consider the cost of living and the school system. What about your spouse's profession? There are no restrictions regarding a married couple working in the same organization within the government.

YOUR CLASSIFICATION?

Is this an *exempt* or *non-exempt* position?

- **Exempt positions** are considered professional and not eligible for overtime pay.
- **Non-exempt positions** are considered non-professional and are eligible for overtime pay.
- **Chemists and chemical engineers** are usually exempt positions.
- **Technician** is usually a non-exempt position.

The government has hired a great many post-docs during recent years. You have to consider how a post-doc position would add to your skill base or your resume. Post-docs in some cases do help you to get into a permanent position, but this is not



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What a

Chemist
should

consider

before accepting a
GOVERNMENT
position . .



Committee on Economic
and Professional Affairs

A federal government position will allow you to contribute to the country as a whole. All federal government workers are under much the same system and schedule, although some agencies operate independently and therefore may have different work rules and policies.

The federal government employs chemists in many agencies such as the National Institutes of Health, the Army, Air Force and Navy, the Departments of Energy, Transportation, and Agriculture, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Government jobs in general are more stable and do not shift geographically (with the exception of a re-organization). Also, one can move within the government from one agency to another and retain one's total years of service for pension calculation. The government fiscal year begins October 1.

BEFORE YOU ACCEPT, HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT...

COMPENSATION?

Is the salary competitive? Government salaries are usually lower than those in industry. At present, chemical engineers in government have a higher rate of pay than chemists. In the federal government, your rate of pay is determined by:

- The pay system under which your job is classified.
- The grade level at which you are hired.
- The step level within that grade.

Positions in professional, administrative, and technical categories for chemists or chemical engineers are covered by the General Schedule (GS), a nationwide pay structure that consists of 15 grades, with 10 step levels within each grade. The rates of pay for GS positions are established by Congress. Certain GS positions that are difficult to fill are covered by special rates approved by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

- 2002 starting salaries for technicians, who are typically hired at the GS-7 level, are about \$29,000.
- 2002 starting salaries for new BS chemists, who are typically hired at the GS-8 or GS-9 level, are about \$35,600.
- 2002 starting salaries for new MS chemists, who are typically hired at the GS9 or GS-10 level, are about \$39,200.
- 2002 starting salaries for new PhD chemists, who are typically hired at the GS-12 level, are about \$55,000.
- 2002 starting salaries for post-docs, who are generally hired at the GS-12 level, are about also \$55,000.

Every year there is a cost of living increase for all federal employees. You may also be eligible for "locality pay" increases designed to close the pay gap between federal and private sector workers.

FEDERAL EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT SYSTEM (FERS)

This is three-tiered retirement plan for federal workers consisting of:

- Social Security

- A government matching savings plan. The federal government matches 100% of the first 5% of your salary that you contribute. You can contribute up to 10% of your salary into the savings plan.

It is the job of the Human Resources department at the government agency which made you the offer to help you explore these issues. Take advantage of their knowledge.

CAREER GROWTH?

Career growth is more important than starting salary and the benefits package for long-term economic well-being. It is also more difficult to evaluate. Answers to the following may help:

- What are the opportunities for development? Are there international opportunities for development?
- Does the position allow for advancement?
- Can you excel under your supervisor? Will your supervisor be a mentor, give you the one-on-one time you will need to further your career? Personalities may be a factor, but what your supervisor can and will do for you is far more important.

HOW WILL YOU SPEND THE DAY?

- In the laboratory, in the office, or traveling?
- With scientists, vendors, customers, or administrators, possibly including those from international companies and governmental organizations?