Occupational Pay Across Regions in 1994

BY JOHN E. BUCKLEY

Average occupational earnings differ considerably among the Nation's four regions as defined by the Bureau of the Census. An examination of 38 commonly found jobs in 5 selected occupational groups reveals that earnings are likely to be highest in the West and Northeast and lowest in the South. Among these groups, average earnings across regions were more uniform within the professional and administrative group than within any of the other categories. Some possible factors influencing regional pay levels include area or regional differences in industrial composition, living costs, unemployment rates, and degree of unionization.

Professional and administrative occupations

All of the jobs in the professional and administrative occupational group were classified into at least four work levels, as in the case of registered nurses, and as many as eight, as was true for engineers. The work levels selected for analysis were the highest-populated ones within each job, and they generally represented the middle position within the range. Among the jobs compared in 1994, the highest average weekly pay among the jobs shown in table 1 was for attorneys, level III, ($1,289) in the West. Their average pay was about 4 percent above the national average for comparable attorneys, and 10 percent above that of those in the South.

Average weekly earnings of engineers, level IV, were tightly clustered around the national average for that level ($1,094), with about a 1-percent difference in pay among the four regions. This contrasted sharply with nurses, level II, whose average earnings in the Northeast and West were about 20 percent higher than those in the South and Midwest.

Technical and protective service occupations

Health-related technical jobs and protective service occupations provided the sharpest earnings differences among the regions. Earnings of licensed practical nurses, level II, and nursing assistants, level II, in the Northeast surpassed those of comparable workers elsewhere. The difference was especially pronounced for nursing assistants, whose average

John E. Buckley is an economist in the Division of Compensation Data Analysis and Planning, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Telephone (202) 606-6204.

Survey occupations and work levels

Occupations in the Occupational Compensation Survey Program are divided into work levels based on duties and responsibilities. The number of levels varies by occupation, as does the degree of difficulty and responsibility. The levels, indicated by Roman numerals, do not necessarily identify equal work levels among different occupational groups. For example, attorney levels I-IV equate to accountant levels III-VI. In addition, the work levels studied are not intended to represent all workers in a specific occupation. The duties and responsibilities of an establishment's top engineers, for example, may exceed those of the highest level of engineers in the survey.

Table 1. Average weekly earnings and relative[1] pay levels of professional and administrative occupations, United States and four regions, September 1994

Occupation	U.S.	Northeast	South	Midwest	West	Dispersion percent[2]
Accountants III	$767	$779 (102)	$747 (97)	$759 (99)	$787 (103)	5
Attorney III	1241	1267 (102)	1172 (94)	1257 101)	1289 (104)	10
Engineers IV	1094	1092 (100)	1090 (100)	1092 (100)	1104 (101)	1
Nurses II	710	799 (113)	647 (91)	662 (93)	789 (111)	23
Buyers II	642	661 (103)	614 (96)	642 (100)	664 (103)	8
Computer programmers III	743	755 (102)	724 (97)	742 (100)	765 (103)	6
Computer systems analysts II	892	898 (101)	871 (98)	885 (99)	915 (103)	5
Personnel specialists III	768	772 (101)	740 (96)	760 (99)	805 (105)	9

[1] Relative pay levels, shown in parentheses, indicate regional pay as a percent of national pay for the same job. Average pay of accountants III in the Northeast, for example, is approximately 2 percent higher than the nationwide average for the job.

[2] The dispersion percent shows the percentage difference between average earnings in the highest paying and the lowest paying region.

Table 2. Average weekly earnings and relative[1] pay levels of technical and protective service occupations, United States and four regions, September 1994

Occupation	U.S.	Northeast	South	Midwest	West	Dispersion percent[2]
Computer operators II	$433	$455 (105)	$418 (97)	$430 (99)	$446 (103)	9
Drafters III	607	608 (100)	604 (100)	597 (98)	633 (104)	6
Engineering technicians IV	739	705 (95)	734 (99)	766 (104)	749 (101)	9
Licensed practical nurses II	448	522 (117)	411 (92)	440 (98)	504 (113)	27
Nursing assistants II	276	348 (126)	239 (87)	264 (96)	285 (103)	46
Corrections officers	533	651 (122)	422 (79)	508 (95)	671 (126)	59
Firefighters	631	697 (110)	516 (82)	638 (101)	770 (122)	49
Police officers I	660	731 (111)	532 (81)	641 (97)	788 (119)	48

[1] Relative pay levels, shown in parentheses, indicate regional pay as a percent of national pay for the same job. Average pay of computer operators II in the Northeast, for example, is approximately 5 percent higher than the nationwide average for the job.

[2] The dispersion percent shows the percentage difference between average earnings in the highest paying and the lowest paying region.

weekly earnings in the Northeast ($348) exceeded the next highest regional average (in the West) by 22 percent, and exceeded the average in the South by 46 percent. Regional pay dispersion was considerably narrower for the three remaining technical jobs shown in table 2—computer operators, drafters, and engineering technicians.

Among protective service occupations, the average weekly earnings of corrections officers in the West ($671) exceeded those of corrections officers in the South by 59 percent. In this survey of non-Federal establishments, almost all of the protective service workers reported—corrections officers, firefighters, and police officers—are State or local government employees. In terms of regional differences in average earnings, the protective service jobs can be categorized as well above the national average (West and Northeast), at or near the average (Midwest), or well below the average (South).

Office clerical occupations

Except for order clerks, level I, regional earnings differences for office clerical workers followed the pattern generally applicable to the professional and administrative group above. That is, for most jobs, earnings were moderately above the national average in the Northeast and West, and near or moderately below the average in the South and Midwest. The average weekly earnings of order clerks, level I, in the Northeast ($391) were 35 percent higher than the average in the Midwest which had the lowest pay of the four regions for this occupation ($290). (The duties of order clerks, level I, typically involve receiving customers' purchase orders for readily identified materials or merchandise.)

Maintenance and toolroom occupations

Seven of the eight blue-collar occupations in table 4 are single-level jobs, the exception being the maintenance electronics technician job which was studied at three work levels. National hourly average earnings ranged from $10.42 for general maintenance workers to $18.89 for maintenance pipefitters. The average hourly rate of pipefitters in the Midwest ($20.06) was the only regional average to meet or surpass the national average. The same pattern was true for general maintenance workers in the North-

east, where the average rate ($12.24 per hour) exceeded the national average by 17 percent.

Regional earnings dispersion among the eight skilled occupations, as measured by average hourly rates, was widest for general maintenance workers and maintenance machinists (30 percent) and narrowest for maintenance electronics technicians, level II (8 percent). For 7 of the 8 jobs, the highest average earnings were found in the West or Midwest—the notable exception being general maintenance workers in the Northeast. Averages were typically lowest in the South.

Material movement and custodial occupations

Tractor trailer truckdrivers had the highest average earnings among this group of 8 material movement and custodial jobs. Regionally, the truckdriver rate ranged from $12.02 per hour in the South to $14.93 in the Northeast. The national hourly average rate for guards, level I, ($6.74) was $1 below the average for the next lowest paid occupational category, janitors. In most cases, average hourly earnings of material movement and custodial workers in the Northeast surpassed the average earnings of comparable workers in other regions. The average hourly rate of material handling laborers in the Midwest ($10.60), however, surpassed the rate for comparable workers in the Northeast ($10.25). Earnings' differences between these two regions were insignificant for forklift operators and shipping/receiving clerks.

Trends in regional pay, 1975-95

Since the 1970s, the Bureau's Employment Cost Index tracked the movement of wages and salaries by several categories, including region. In the 20-year period ending in 1995, the wages and salaries of private industry workers in the Northeast and West registered the largest average annual percent increase (5.3 percent), and the smallest in the Midwest (5.0). (See table 6.)

Regional changes for the 20-year period mask variations that occurred over shorter time spans. In the earliest period shown (1975-81), wage and salary increases were smallest in the Northeast during that era of high inflation; during the next 14 years (1981-95), average wage increases in the Northeast outstripped those of any other region.

Table 3. Average weekly earnings and relative[1] pay levels of office clerical occupations, United States and four regions, September 1994

Occupation	U.S.	Northeast	South	Midwest	West	Dispersion percent[2]
Accounting clerks II	$362	$376 (104)	$350 (97)	$354 (98)	$381 (105)	9
General clerks III	408	410 (100)	369 (90)	403 (99)	434 (106)	18
Order clerks I	328	391 (119)	305 (93)	290 (88)	362 (110)	35
Key entry operators I	319	354 (111)	301 (94)	308 (97)	332 (104)	18
Secretaries III	530	552 (104)	498 (94)	533 (101)	550 (104)	11
Word processors II	457	452 (99)	415 (91)	468 (102)	484 (106)	17

[1] Relative pay levels, shown in parentheses, indicate regional pay as a percent of national pay for the same job. Average pay of accounting clerks II in the Northeast, for example, is approximately 4 percent higher than the nationwide average for the job.

[2] The dispersion percent shows the percentage difference between average earnings in the highest paying and the lowest paying region.

Table 4. Average hourly earnings and relative[1] pay levels of maintenance and toolroom occupations, United States and four regions, September 1994

Occupation	U.S.	Northeast	South	Midwest	West	Dispersion percent[2]
General maintenance workers	$10.42	$12.24 (117)	$9.39 (90)	$10.02 (96)	$10.21 (98)	30
Maintenance electricians	17.65	17.88 (101)	15.72 (89)	18.83 (107)	18.81 (107)	20
Maintenance electronics technicians II	17.39	17.50 (101)	17.18 (99)	16.97 (98)	18.29 (105)	8
Maintenance machinists	16.73	16.57 (99)	14.82 (89)	16.97 (101)	19.26 (115)	30
Maintenance mechanics, machinery	16.24	15.50 (95)	14.95 (92)	17.41 (107)	17.63 (109)	18
Maintenance mechanics, motor vehicle	15.15	16.07 (106)	13.27 (88)	15.64 (103)	16.48 (109)	24
Maintenance pipefitters	18.89	18.29 (97)	17.69 (94)	20.06 (106)	18.68 (99)	13
Tool and die makers	18.23	17.16 (94)	17.62 (97)	19.08 (105)	18.79 (103)	11

[1] Relative pay levels, shown in parentheses, indicate regional pay as a percent of national pay for the same job. Average pay of general maintenance workers in the Northeast, for example, is approximately 17 percent higher than the nationwide average for the job.

[2] The dispersion percent shows the percentage difference between average earnings in the highest paying and the lowest paying region

Table 5. Average hourly earnings and relative[1] pay levels of material movement and custodial occupations, United States and four regions, September 1994

Occupation	U.S.	Northeast	South	Midwest	West	Dispersion percent[2]
Forklift operators	$10.48	$12.07 (115)	$9.14 (87)	$12.08 (115)	$11.05 (105)	32
Guards I	6.74	7.41 (110)	6.26 (93)	6.53 (97)	6.89 (102)	18
Janitors	7.74	9.46 (122)	6.19 (80)	7.99 (103)	7.97 (103)	53
Material handling laborers	9.18	10.25 (112)	8.04 (88)	10.60 (115)	8.11 (88)	32
Order fillers	9.24	10.54 (114)	8.38 (91)	9.05 (98)	10.34 (112)	26
Shipping/receiving clerks	10.13	10.52 (104)	9.55 (94)	10.53 (104)	10.12 (100)	10
Truckdrivers, tractor trailer	13.71	14.93 (109)	12.02 (88)	14.41 (105)	14.17 (103)	24
Warehouse specialists	11.99	13.31 (111)	10.75 (90)	12.44 (104)	12.16 (101)	24

[1] Relative pay levels, shown in parentheses, indicate regional pay as a percent of national pay for the same job. Average pay of forklift operators in the Northeast, for example, is approximately 15 percent higher than the nationwide average for the job.

[2] The dispersion percent shows the percentage difference between average earnings in the highest paying and the lowest paying region.

Table 6. Average annual percent change in wages and salaries by region, private industry, selected periods, 1975-95

Occupation	September 1975-June 1981	June 1981-June 1995	September 1975-June 1995
United States	8.1	4.0	5.2
Northeast	7.3	4.5	5.3
South	8.2	3.9	5.1
Midwest	8.1	3.7	5.0
West	8.8	3.9	5.3