



Office of the Assistant to the Secretary for
Labor Relations

LABOR RELATIONS LETTER

Date: December 2, 1996

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Subject: **Labor standards compliance requirements for self-employed laborers and mechanics (aka *Working Subcontractors*)**

- I. HUD policy on prevailing wage applicability.**
- II. Compliance and certification parameters.**
- III. Owners of businesses working with their crews.**
- IV. Owner-Operators of power equipment.**
- V. Truck drivers.**

The Federal prevailing wage requirements and compliance standards for self-employed laborers and mechanics (also referred to as "working subcontractors") have long been a confusing and contentious area for the Department of Labor (DOL), HUD, the Internal Revenue Service and contractors and subcontractors.

The following policy represents an effort to provide practical guidance for field application. The guidance more specifically concerns the wage certification requirements for self-employed mechanics and laborers on projects subject to Federal labor standards provisions including Davis-Bacon and HUD-determined maintenance and nonroutine maintenance prevailing wage rate determinations. This policy does not attempt to establish whether working subcontractors are subject to Federal labor standards nor whether such working subcontractors are *bona fide*. The clear meaning of statutory provisions and regulatory definitions does not require further examination of applicability. Additionally, statutory and regulatory language are clear that the question of whether certain self-employed laborers and mechanics are *bona fide* subcontractors is not germane to the issue of prevailing wage standard applicability¹.

I. HUD policy on prevailing wage applicability.

The Davis-Bacon Act (DBA), HUD program Related Acts (DBRA) concerning the payment of prevailing wages as determined by the Secretary of Labor, and the U.S. Housing Act of 1937 concerning the payment of prevailing wage rates established by HUD provide that the wage protections afforded in these statutes apply to laborers and mechanics employed on the covered work. The DBA and DBRA implementing regulations (29 CFR Part 5) specifically stipulate that these protections are provided **regardless of any contractual relationship which may be alleged to exist** between the contractor and such laborers and mechanics. Additionally, all laborers and mechanics must be paid unconditionally and not less often than once per week. HUD has followed DBA/DBRA prevailing wage parameters in its implementation, administration and enforcement of HUD-determined maintenance and nonroutine maintenance prevailing wage standards. (NOTE: The requirement to pay weekly wages is not applicable to the payment of prevailing routine maintenance wage rates related to laborers and mechanics engaged in the operation of PHA and IHA housing developments.)

¹ The DOL has issued an administrative policy which excludes "bona fide owner-operators of trucks who are independent contractors" from DBRA/CWHSSA provisions. See paragraph V.

Therefore, it is HUD policy that in all cases where laborers and mechanics are employed on Federal prevailing wage-covered construction, maintenance and nonroutine maintenance work, laborers and mechanics shall be entitled to compensation (in the case of Davis-Bacon wages, weekly compensation) at wage rates not less than the prevailing rate for the type of work they perform **regardless of any contractual relationship alleged to exist between a contractor or subcontractor and such laborers or mechanics.**

The above policy statement is not a departure from previous HUD directives. The guidance presented below establishes uniform HUD-assisted program contract administration and enforcement parameters for labor standards compliance and prevailing wage certification.

II. Compliance and certification parameters.

HUD policy clearly affords prevailing wage protection for all laborers and mechanics, regardless of contractual relationship. There is no exception to this protection for self-employed laborers or mechanics, including owners of businesses, sole-proprietors, partners, corporate officers, or others. This policy in no way precludes or limits any business or individual from participating in HUD-assisted construction, maintenance, or nonroutine maintenance work. The issue is not one of *eligibility*, whether such persons are permitted to work on HUD-assisted projects, but of compliance standards - what HUD will accept from contractors and subcontractors to demonstrate that proper compliance has been achieved.

In this context, this Letter establishes a HUD administrative policy that laborers and mechanics may not certify to the payment of their **own** prevailing wages **EXCEPT** where the laborer or mechanic is the owner of a business working on the site of the work with his/her own crew. (This exception is described in detail in Paragraph III. Owner-operators of power equipment are discussed in Paragraph IV; Truck drivers are discussed in Paragraph V.)

The most frequent occurrence of self-employed workers on HUD-assisted projects involves mechanic/trade classifications (i.e., not laborer classifications). (For ease of reference, laborers and mechanics in this context are referred to as "mechanics" and include any case involving laborers.) These mechanics may be represented as sole-proprietors, self-employed mechanics, partners, or corporate officers - all with no direct employees engaged in the covered work.

Accordingly, HUD, and program participants responsible for labor standards administration and enforcement (e.g., PHAs, IHAs, CDBG recipients), may not accept certified payrolls reporting single or multiple owners (e.g., partners) certifying that they have paid to themselves the prevailing wage for their craft. For example, a sole-proprietor may not submit a payroll reporting himself or herself as simply "Owner" signing the certification as to his/her own wage payment from "draws" or other payment methods. Neither may several mechanics submit a payroll reporting themselves as "partners" with one or more certifying as to the payment of their wages or salaries. Such mechanics must instead be carried on the certified payroll of the contractor or subcontractor (the "responsible employer") for whom they are working and with whom they have executed a "contract" for services.

In these cases, maintenance of an accurate accounting of weekly work hours including any overtime hours for such mechanics is essential. Whatever method of compensation computation is utilized (piecework, weekly contract draw for performance), the amount of weekly compensation divided by the actual hours of work performed for that week must result in an "effective" hourly wage rate for that week that is not less than the prevailing hourly rate for the type of work involved. This computation must take into account overtime pay rates (i.e., one and one half) for all hours worked in excess of 40 hours per week, pursuant to the Contract Work Hours and Safety Standards Act (CWHSSA), where applicable, and pursuant to the Fair Labor Standards Act where CWHSSA is not applicable.

The name, work classification, actual hours of work, effective hourly wage rate, and wage payment for each such mechanic must be reported and certified on the responsible employer's weekly payroll. Note that the effective hourly wage rate for such mechanics may fluctuate from week to week. However, the effective hourly wage rate **may not** be less than the minimum prevailing rate for the respective craft. In any case where the effective rate falls below the corresponding craft prevailing wage rate, the responsible employer must compensate the mechanic at no less than the prevailing rate on the wage determination for that craft.

III. **Owners of businesses working with their crew.**

Owners of businesses working with their crew on the same HUD-assisted job site may certify to the payment of their own prevailing wages in conjunction with the prevailing wages paid to their employees. This exception to reporting standards *does not* suggest that such owners are not likewise entitled to prevailing wages for their labor. Rather, it accepts the wage payment certification on weekly payroll reports by the owner for his/her own wages as that certification *accompanies* the certification offered for the payment of prevailing wages to his/her employees. Such owners need only list their name, work classification including "owner," and the daily and total hours worked. (Such owners *do not* need to list a rate of pay or amounts earned.)

IV. **Owner-operators of power equipment.**

Frequently, *owner-operators of power equipment* (e.g., backhoes, front-end loaders) will contract for services at a rate for both "man and machine." In these cases, the owner-operator includes liability, equipment maintenance, and salary in an hourly or contract rate for services. Because of the prevalence of such practice and the inherent difficulty in ascribing costs for liability and maintenance costs versus hourly *labor* salary, HUD and its program clients may accept a combined ("man and machine") hourly rate on the responsible contractor's certified payroll provided that such hourly rate may not be less than the rate on the wage determination for the respective power equipment operator.

Note: Owner-operators of power equipment, like self-employed mechanics, may not submit their own payrolls certifying to the payment of their own wages BUT must be carried on the responsible contractor's certified payroll report.

V. **Truck drivers.**

As outlined earlier in this Letter, a DOL administrative policy excludes *bona fide owner-operators of trucks who are independent contractors* from DBRA/CWHSSA provisions concerning their own hours of work and rate(s) of pay. These truck "owner-operators" must be reported on weekly payrolls *but* the payrolls do not need to show the hours worked or rates - only the notation "Owner-operator." **Note** that any laborers or mechanics, including truck drivers, employed by the owner-operator/independent contractor are subject to DBRA/CWHSSA provisions in the usual manner.

This policy **does not** pertain to owner-operators of other equipment such as backhoes, bulldozers, cranes and scrapers (i.e., power equipment as noted in paragraph IV, above).

These compliance standards shall take effect immediately. Any exceptions to these standards must be approved in advance in writing by HUD Headquarters Office of Labor Relations.

Any questions concerning this Letter may be directed to the Office of Labor Relations at (202)708-0370 or, in the case of HUD program participants, to the HUD Field Labor Relations Staff with jurisdiction for your area.