

(b) A Special Achievement Award may be given when an individual's performance in one or more of the most important job elements substantially exceeds the performance requirements for regularly assigned duties and when the employee's performance appraisal supports the conclusion that overall performance substantially exceeds an acceptable level of competence and performance of all critical elements is at least fully satisfactory for a period of at least three months or, in the case of summer employees, for a period of at least two months. A cash award for this performance shall be an amount consistent with the following guidelines:

1. Within DOT, sustained superior performance cash awards shall not exceed 6% of the base pay of the employee. The actual amount of the award is to be the approving officer's best estimate of the employee's achievement. The amount will be calculated on the retained rate for employees entitled to pay retention; and on the saved grade for employees entitled to grade retention. This does not limit awards for special acts or for contributions which may be appropriately paid under the Suggestion Program.
2. While a Sustained Performance Award (SSP) can be granted on performance for a three-month period, the full amount of an SSP can only be granted once within a 52-week period. After the 52-week period of the granting of the full amount of the first SSP, subsequent SSPs in the same position should be based on the performance for a full year.

(2) *Quality Step Increases.*

(a). *Appropriate Use*

- (1). The high quality performance deserving of a quality step increase must have been sustained for at least three months whatever the position. No more than one quality step increase may be granted within any 52-week period.
- (2). The recommendation to grant a quality step increase must be supported by the employee's most recent appraisal, or when the appraisal is more than 60 days old, by a supplemental written statement setting forth the reasons for granting the quality step increase.
- (3). A quality step increase may be granted to an employee only when at the time it becomes effective the employee is expected to remain at least 60 days in the same or similar position at the same grade level in which his or her performance can be expected to continue at the same level of effectiveness.
- (4). A quality step increase can only be granted when the most recent performance appraisal supports the conclusion that overall performance of the employee's assigned duties and responsibilities substantially exceeds an acceptable level of competence, and performance of all critical job elements has been at least satisfactory.
- (5). Operating Administrations must inform their employees at least annually of the number of quality step increases granted by grade level.