

§ 220.121

(b) *Physical abilities.* When the Board assesses the claimant's physical abilities, the Board assesses the severity of his or her impairment(s) and determines his or her residual functional capacity for work activity on a regular and continuing basis. The Board considers the claimant's ability to do physical activities such as walking, standing, lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling, reaching, handling, and the evaluation of other physical functions. A limited ability to do these things may reduce the claimant's ability to do work.

(c) *Mental impairments.* When the board assesses a claimant's mental impairment(s), the Board considers the factors, such as—

(1) His or her ability to understand, to carry out, and remember instructions; and

(2) His or her ability to respond appropriately to supervision, co-workers, and work pressures in a work setting.

(d) *Other impairments.* Some medically determinable impairments, such as skin impairments, epilepsy, and impairments of vision, hearing, or other senses, postural and manipulative limitations, and environmental restrictions do not limit physical exertion. If the claimant has this type of impairment, in addition to one that affects physical exertion, the Board considers both in deciding his or her residual functional capacity.

§ 220.121 Responsibility for assessing and determining residual functional capacity.

(a) For cases at the initial or reconsideration level, the responsibility for determining residual functional capacity rests with the bureau of retirement claims. This assessment is based on all the evidence the Board has, including any statements regarding what the claimant can still do that have been provided by treating or examining physicians, consultative physicians, or any other physician designated by the Board. In any case where there is evidence which indicates the existence of a mental impairment, the bureau of retirement claims will not make a residual functional capacity determination without making every reasonable effort to ensure that a qualified psychia-

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trist or psychologist has provided a medical review of the case.

(b) For cases at the hearing level or the three-member-Board review level, the responsibility for deciding residual functional capacity rests with the hearings officer or the three-member Board, respectively.

Subpart K—Vocational Considerations

§ 220.125 When vocational background is considered.

(a) *General.* The Board will consider vocational factors when the claimant is applying for—

(1) An employee annuity based on disability for any regular employment; (See § 220.45(b))

(2) Widow(er) disability annuity; or

(3) Child's disability annuity based on disability before age 22.

(b) *Disability determinations in which vocational factors must be considered along with medical evidence.* When the Board cannot decide whether the claimant is disabled on medical evidence alone, the Board must use other evidence.

(1) The Board will use information from the claimant about his or her age, education, and work experience.

(2) The Board will consider the doctors' reports, and hospital records, as well as the claimant's own statements and other evidence to determine a claimant's residual functional capacity and how it affects the work the claimant can do. Sometimes, to do this, the Board will need to ask the claimant to have special examinations or tests. (See § 220.50.)

(3) If the Board finds that the claimant can no longer do the work he or she has done in the past, the Board will determine whether the claimant can do other work (jobs) which exist in significant numbers in the national economy.

§ 220.126 Relationship of ability to do work and residual functional capacity.

(a) If the claimant can do his or her previous work (his or her usual work or other applicable past work), the Board will determine he or she is not disabled.

(b) If the residual functional capacity is not enough for the claimant to do any of his or her previous work, the Board must still decide if the claimant can do any other work. To determine whether the claimant can do other work, the Board will consider the claimant's residual functional capacity, and his or her age, education, and work experience. Any work (jobs) that the claimant can do must exist in significant numbers in the national economy (either in the region where he or she lives or in several regions of the country).

§ 220.127 When the only work experience is arduous unskilled physical labor.

(a) *Arduous work.* Arduous work is primarily physical work requiring a high level of strength or endurance. The Board will consider the claimant unable to do lighter work and therefore, disabled if he or she has—

(1) A marginal education (see § 220.129);

(2) Work experience of 35 years or more during which he or she did arduous unskilled physical labor; and

(3) A severe impairment which no longer allows him or her to do arduous unskilled physical labor.

(b) *Exceptions.* The Board may consider the claimant not disabled if—

(1) The claimant is working or has worked despite his or her impairment(s) (except where work is sporadic or not medically advisable); or

(2) Evidence shows that the claimant has training or past work experience which enables him or her to do substantial gainful activity in another occupation with his or her impairment, either full-time or on reasonably regular part-time basis.

Example: B is a 60-year-old miner with a 4th grade education who has a life-long history of arduous physical labor. B says that he is disabled because of arthritis of the spine, hips, and knees, and other impairments. Medical evidence shows a combination of impairments and establishes that these impairments prevent B from performing his usual work or any other type of arduous physical labor. His vocational background does not show that he has skills or capabilities needed to do lighter work which would be readily transferable to another

work setting. Under these circumstances, the Board will find that B is disabled.

§ 220.128 Age as a vocational factor.

(a) *General.* (1) *Age* refers to how old the claimant is (chronological age) and the extent to which his or her age affects his or her ability to—

(i) Adapt to a new work situation; and

(ii) Do work in competition with others.

(2) In determining disability, the Board does not consider age alone. The Board must also consider the claimant's residual functional capacity, education, and work experience. If the claimant is unemployed because of his or her age and can still do a significant number of jobs which exist in the national economy, the Board will find that he or she is not disabled. Appendix 2 of this part explains in detail how the Board considers age as a vocational factor. However, the Board does not apply these age categories mechanically in a borderline situation.

(b) *Younger person.* If the claimant is under age 50, the Board generally does not consider that his or her age will seriously affect the ability to adapt to a new work situation. In some circumstances, the Board considers age 45 a handicap in adapting to a new work setting (see Rule 201.17 in appendix 2 of this part).

(c) *Person approaching advanced age.* If the claimant is closely approaching advanced age (50-54), the Board considers that the claimant's age, along with a severe impairment and limited work experience, may seriously affect the claimant's ability to adjust to a significant number of jobs in the national economy.

(d) *Person of advanced age.* The Board considers that advanced age (55 or over) is the point at which age significantly affects the claimant's ability to do substantial gainful activity.

(1) If the claimant is severely impaired and of advanced age, and he or she cannot do medium work (see § 220.132), the claimant may not be able to work unless he or she has skills that can be used in less demanding jobs which exist in significant numbers in the national economy.