

of weeks in a term times the number of terms required to complete the degree.

- 16. Revise § 410.308 to read as follows:

§ 410.308 Training to obtain an academic degree.

(a) An agency may authorize training for an employee to obtain an academic degree under conditions prescribed at 5 U.S.C. 4107(a).

(b) Colleges and universities participating in an academic degree training program must be accredited by a nationally recognized body. A “nationally recognized body” is a regional, national, or international accrediting organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. The listing of accrediting bodies is available through the Department.

(c) The selection of employees for an academic degree training program must follow the requirements of § 335.103(b)(3), § 335.103(c)(1)(iii), and subpart A of part 300 of this chapter. The selection and assignment must be accomplished to meet one or more of the criteria identified in 5 U.S.C. 4107(a). Therefore, an agency may competitively select and assign an employee to an academic degree training program that qualifies the employee for promotion to a higher graded position or to a position that requires an academic degree.

(d) Agency heads must assess and maintain records on the effectiveness of training assignments under this section.

(e) On a periodic basis, OPM may request agency information on the use and effectiveness of training assignments under this section.

- 17. Add paragraph (b)(3) to § 410.309 to read as follows:

§ 410.309 Agreements to continue in service.

* * * * *

(b) Requirements. * * *

(3) The head of an agency shall establish procedures to compute length of training period for academic degree training programs in accordance with § 410.310(d).

- 18. Amend § 410.310 to add paragraph (d) to read as follows:

§ 410.310 Computing time in training.

* * * * *

(d) When an employee is pursuing an academic degree through an agency academic degree training program, an agency may compute the length of the academic degree training period based on the academic institution’s established contact hours.

[FR Doc. 04–13426 Filed 6–9–04; 5:03 pm]

BILLING CODE 6325–39–P

OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

5 CFR Parts 831 and 842

RIN 3206–AJ82

Voluntary Early Retirement Under the Homeland Security Act of 2002

AGENCY: Office of Personnel Management.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is issuing final voluntary early retirement authority regulations. These regulations implement the voluntary early retirement authority provisions of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, which apply to most executive branch agencies. They explain how an agency requests authority from OPM to offer voluntary early retirement to its employees.

DATES: These regulations are effective June 14, 2004.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Charles W. Gray at 202–606–0960, FAX at 202–606–2329, TTY at 202–418–3134, or e-mail at cwgray@opm.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: OPM published interim voluntary early retirement authority regulations on June 13, 2003 (*Federal Register*, volume 68, number 114, fr13jn03–2). As a result, agencies may now receive OPM approval to use voluntary early retirement authority to reshape their workforces for reasons other than downsizing. The alternative to reshaping the workforce through voluntary measures such as early retirement is generally a reduction in force—a tool that can be disruptive and costly, both to employees and agencies. Agencies with a need for downsizing or reshaping their workforces can benefit from the ability to use the voluntary early retirement authority flexibilities that the final version of these regulations will provide.

Section 1313(b) of the “Homeland Security Act of 2002” (Public Law 107–296, 116 Stat. 2135) provides agencies the option to offer voluntary early retirement when restructuring as well as downsizing. Previously, voluntary early retirement was only available to agencies when they needed to downsize. To obtain voluntary early retirement authority, unless an agency has a separate statutory authority, it must request approval from OPM. The request must provide the information required by section 1313(b) of Public Law 107–296. OPM will review the agency’s request, and, if it meets

requirements, issue voluntary early retirement authority. The agency must have OPM approval before using voluntary early retirement authority.

The voluntary early retirement provisions are the same under the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) and the Federal Employees’ Retirement System (FERS). Section 831.114 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, is revised to implement the voluntary early retirement provisions under CSRS that were amended by section 1313(b)(1) of Public Law 107–296 and codified in 5 U.S.C. 8336(d)(2). Section 842.213 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, is revised to implement the voluntary early retirement provisions under FERS that were amended by section 1313(b)(2) of Public Law 107–296 and codified in 5 U.S.C. 8414(b)(1). The regulations explain which employees are potentially eligible for voluntary early retirement, how an agency requests voluntary early retirement authority from OPM, and how the agency manages the voluntary early retirement authority after approval.

An agency’s human capital plan and/or voluntary separation incentive payment implementation plan may be used to satisfy the requirements for requesting a voluntary early retirement authority if it contains the information required in the voluntary early retirement authority regulations.

The revised sections 831.114 and 842.213 expand the definition of “specific designee” and describe how agencies are to inform employees returning from military leave about the voluntary early retirement offers they may have missed while they were away. The definition of “specific designee” in the interim regulations provided only two examples. It was felt that agency officials might believe that only individuals in one of the two types of positions described in those examples could serve as specific designees. The definition is expanded in the final rule to reduce the possibility of such an error.

During the comment period described in the interim regulations, we received only one comment. It came from a labor organization concerned with the manner in which agencies may limit voluntary early retirement offers. Because the comment conflicted with existing law, and was outside the scope of these regulations, OPM is not adopting the suggestion made by the labor organization in its comments.

After the comment period, two agencies raised questions about employees on military leave who would have, but for their current military service, received voluntary early

retirement offers. Section 4311 of title 38, United States Code, requires that agencies treat employees on military duty as though they were still on the job. Further, it specifies that employees are not to be disadvantaged because of their military service. Because of these requirements, we have included a paragraph in sections 831.114 and 842.213 describing voluntary early retirement provisions for employees on military leave.

For the convenience of the reader, we have restated criteria contained in the 5 U.S.C. 8336(d)(2) and 5 U.S.C. 8414(b)(1)(B), in sections 831.114(k)(2) and 842.213(k)(2), respectively. We have removed sections 831.114(h) and 842.213(h) from the interim regulation, and renumbered the final regulation accordingly, because these provisions are contained in the newly added statutory language.

Regulatory Flexibility Act

I certify that this regulation will not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities because it affects only certain Federal employees.

Executive Order 12866, Regulatory Review

This rule has been reviewed by the Office of Management and Budget in accordance with Executive Order 12866.

List of Subjects

5 CFR Part 831

Administrative practice and procedure, Alimony, Claims, Firefighters, Government employees, Income taxes, Intergovernmental regulations, Law enforcement officers, Pensions, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements, Retirement.

5 CFR Part 842

Air Traffic Controllers, Alimony, Firefighters, Government employees, Law enforcement officers, Pensions, Retirement.

U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

Kay Coles James,
Director.

■ Accordingly, OPM amends parts 831 and 842 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, as follows:

PART 831—RETIREMENT

■ 1. The authority citation for part 831 is revised to read as follows:

Authority: 5 U.S.C. 8347; Sec. 831.102 also issued under 5 U.S.C. 8334; Sec. 831.106 also issued under 5 U.S.C. 552a; Sec. 831.108 also issued under 5 U.S.C. 8336(d)(2); Sec. 831.114 also issued under 5 U.S.C.

8336(d)(2), and section 1313(b)(5) of Pub. L. 107–296, 116 Stat. 2135; Sec. 831.201(b)(1) also issued under 5 U.S.C. 8347(g); Sec. 831.201(b)(6) also issued under 5 U.S.C. 7701(b)(2); Sec. 831.201(g) also issued under sections 11202(f), 11232(e), and 11246(b) of Pub. L. 105–33, 111 Stat. 251; Sec. 831.201(g) also issued under sections 7(b) and 7(e) of Pub. L. 105–274, 112 Stat. 2419; Sec. 831.201(i) also issued under sections 3 and 7(c) of Pub. L. 105–274, 112 Stat. 2419; Sec. 831.204 also issued under section 102(e) of Pub. L. 104–8, 109 Stat. 102, as amended by section 153 of Pub. L. 104–134, 110 Stat. 1321; Sec. 831.205 also issued under section 2207 of Pub. L. 106–265, 114 Stat. 784; Sec. 831.301 also issued under section 2203 of Pub. L. 106–265, 114 Stat. 780; Sec. 831.303 also issued under 5 U.S.C. 8334(d)(2) and section 2203 of Pub. L. 106–235, 114 Stat. 780; Sec. 831.502 also issued under 5 U.S.C. 8337; Sec. 831.502 also issued under section 1(3), E.O. 11228, 3 CFR 1964–1965 Comp. p. 317; Sec. 831.663 also issued under sections 8339(j) and (k)(2); Secs. 831.663 and 831.664 also issued under section 11004(c)(2) of Pub. L. 103–66, 107 Stat. 412; Sec. 831.682 also issued under section 201(d) of Pub. L. 99–251, 100 Stat. 23; Sec. 831.912 also issued under Appendix C to Pub. L. 106–554, 114 Stat. 2763A–125; subpart V also issued under 5 U.S.C. 8343a and section 6001 of Pub. L. 100–203, 101 Stat. 1330–275; Sec. 831.2203 also issued under section 7001(a)(4) of Pub. L. 101–508, 104 Stat. 1388–328.

Subpart A—Administration and General Provisions

■ 2. Section 831.114 is revised to read as follows:

§ 831.114 Voluntary early retirement—substantial delayering, reorganization, reduction in force, transfer of function, or other workforce restructuring.

(a) A *specific designee* is defined as a senior official within an agency who has been specifically designated to sign requests for voluntary early retirement authority under a designation from the head of the agency. Examples include a Chief Human Capital Officer, an Assistant Secretary for Administration, a Director of Human Resources Management, or other official.

(b) An agency's request for voluntary early retirement authority must be signed by the head of the agency or by a specific designee.

(c) The request must contain the following information:

(1) Identification of the agency or specified component(s) for which the authority is being requested;

(2) Reasons why the agency needs voluntary early retirement authority. This must include a detailed summary of the agency's personnel and/or budgetary situation that will result in an excess of personnel because of a substantial delayering, reorganization, reduction in force, transfer of function,

or other workforce restructuring or reshaping, consistent with agency human capital goals;

(3) The date on which the agency expects to effect the substantial delayering, reorganization, reduction in force, transfer of function, or other workforce restructuring or reshaping;

(4) The time period during which the agency plans to offer voluntary early retirement;

(5) The total number of non-temporary employees in the agency (or specified component(s));

(6) The total number of non-temporary employees in the agency (or specified component(s)) who may be involuntarily separated, downgraded, transferred, or reassigned as a result of the substantial delayering, reorganization, reduction in force, transfer of function, or other workforce restructuring or reshaping;

(7) The total number of employees in the agency (or specified component(s)) who are eligible for voluntary early retirement;

(8) An estimate of the total number of employees in the agency (or specified component(s)) who are expected to retire early during the period covered by the request for voluntary early retirement authority; and

(9) A description of the types of personnel actions anticipated as a result of the agency's need for voluntary early retirement authority. Examples include separations, transfers, reassignments, and downgradings.

(d) OPM will evaluate a request for voluntary early retirement based on:

(1) A specific request to OPM from the agency for voluntary early retirement authority;

(2) A voluntary separation incentive payment implementation plan, as discussed in part 576, subpart A, of this chapter, which must outline the intended use of the incentive payments and voluntary early retirement; or

(3) The agency's human capital plan, which must outline its intended use of voluntary separation incentive payments and voluntary early retirement authority, and the changes in organizational structure it expects to make as the result of projected separations and early retirements.

(e) Regardless of the method used, the request must include all of the information required by paragraph (c) of this section.

(f) OPM may approve an agency's request for voluntary early retirement authority to cover the entire period of the substantial delayering, reorganization, reduction in force, transfer of function, or other workforce restructuring or reshaping described by

the agency, or the initial portion of that period with a requirement for subsequent information and justification if the period covers multiple years.

(g) After OPM approves an agency's request, the agency must immediately notify OPM of any subsequent changes in the conditions that served as the basis for the approval of the voluntary early retirement authority. Depending upon the circumstances involved, OPM will modify the authority as necessary to better suit the agency's needs.

(h) The agency may further limit voluntary early retirement offers based on:

(1) An established opening and closing date for the acceptance of applications that is announced to employees at the time of the offer; or

(2) The acceptance of a specified number of applications for voluntary early retirement, provided that, at the time of the offer, the agency notified employees that it retained the right to limit the number of voluntary early retirements.

(i) Within the timeframe specified for its approved voluntary early retirement authority, the agency may subsequently establish a new or revised closing date, or reduce or increase the number of early retirement applications it will accept, if management's downsizing and/or reshaping needs change. If the agency issues a revised closing date, or a revised number of applications to be accepted, the new date or number of applications must be announced to the same group of employees included in the original announcement. If the agency issues a new window period with a new closing date, or a new instance of a specific number of applications to be accepted, the new window period or number of applications to be accepted may be announced to a different group of employees as long as they are covered by the approved voluntary early retirement authority.

(j) Chapter 43 of title 38, United States Code, requires that agencies treat employees on military duty, for all practical purposes, as though they were still on the job. Further, employees are not to be disadvantaged because of their military service. In accordance with these provisions, employees on military duty who would otherwise be eligible for an offer of voluntary early retirement will have 30 days following their return to duty to either accept or reject an offer of voluntary early retirement. This will be true even if the voluntary early retirement authority provided by OPM has expired.

(k) An employee who separates from the service voluntarily after completing

25 years of service, or becoming age 50 and completing 20 years of service, is entitled to an annuity if, on the date of separation, the employee:

(1) Is serving in a position covered by a voluntary early retirement offer; and

(2) Meets the following conditions which are covered in 5 U.S.C.

8336(d)(2):

(i) Has been employed continuously, by the agency in which the employee is serving, for at least the 31-day period ending on the date on which such agency requests the determination referred to in section 831.114(b);

(ii) Is serving under an appointment that is not time limited;

(iii) Has not been duly notified that such employee is to be involuntarily separated for misconduct or unacceptable performance;

(iv) Is separated from the service voluntarily during a period in which, as determined by the Office of Personnel Management (upon request of the agency) under regulations prescribed by the Office:

(A) Such agency (or, if applicable, the component in which the employee is serving) is undergoing substantial delayering, substantial reorganization, substantial reductions in force, substantial transfer of function, or other substantial workforce restructuring (or shaping);

(B) A significant percentage of employees servicing in such agency (or component) are likely to be separated or subject to an immediate reduction in the rate of basic pay (without regard to subchapter VI of chapter 53, or comparable provisions); or

(C) Identified as being in positions which are becoming surplus or excess to the agency's future ability to carry out its mission effectively; and

(v) As determined by the agency under regulations prescribed by the Office, is within the scope of the offer of voluntary early retirement, which may be made based on the following criteria:

(A) 1 or more organizational units;

(B) 1 or more occupational series or levels;

(C) 1 or more geographical locations;

(D) Specific periods;

(E) Skills, knowledge, or other factors related to a position; or

(F) Any appropriate combination of such factors.

(l) Agencies are responsible for ensuring that employees are not coerced into voluntary early retirement. If an agency finds any instances of coercion, it must take appropriate corrective action.

(m) Except as provided in paragraph (j) of this section, an agency may not

offer or process voluntary early retirements beyond the stated expiration date of a voluntary early retirement authority or offer early retirements to employees who are not within the scope of the voluntary early retirement authority approved by OPM.

(n) OPM may terminate a voluntary early retirement authority if it determines that the condition(s) that formed the basis for the approval of the authority no longer exist.

(o) OPM may amend, limit, or terminate a voluntary early retirement authority to ensure that the requirements of this subpart are properly being followed.

(p) Agencies must provide OPM with interim and final reports for each voluntary early retirement authority, as covered in OPM's approval letter to the agency. OPM may suspend or cancel a voluntary early retirement authority if the agency is not in compliance with the reporting requirements or reporting schedule specified in OPM's voluntary early retirement authority approval letter.

PART 842—FEDERAL EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT SYSTEM—BASIC ANNUITY

■ 3. The authority citation for part 842 is revised to read as follows:

Authority: 5 U.S.C. 8461(g); Secs. 842.104 and 842.106 also issued under 5 U.S.C. 8461(n); Sec. 842.104 also issued under sections 3 and 7(c) of Pub. L. 105-274, 112 Stat. 2419; Sec. 842.105 also issued under 5 U.S.C. 8402(c)(1) and 7701(b)(2); Sec. 842.106 also issued under section 102(e) of Pub. L. 104-8, 109 Stat. 102, as amended by section 153 of Pub. L. 104-134, 110 Stat. 1321; Sec. 842.107 also issued under sections 11202(f), 11232(e), and 11246(b) of Pub. L. 105-33, 111 Stat. 251; Sec. 842.107 also issued under section 7(b) of Pub. L. 105-274, 112 Stat. 2419; Sec. 842.108 also issued under section 7(e) of Pub. L. 105-274, 112 Stat. 2419; Sec. 842.213 also issued under 5 U.S.C. 8414(b)(1)(B) and section 1313(b)(5) of Pub. L. 107-296, 116 Stat. 2135; Secs. 842.604 and 842.611 also issued under 5 U.S.C. 8417; Sec. 842.607 also issued under 5 U.S.C. 8416 and 8417; Sec. 842.614 also issued under 5 U.S.C. 8419; Sec. 842.615 also issued under 5 U.S.C. 8418; Sec. 842.703 also issued under section 7001(a)(4) of Pub. L. 101-508, 104 Stat. 1388; Sec. 842.707 also issued under section 6001 of Pub. L. 100-203, 101 Stat. 1300; Sec. 842.708 also issued under section 4005 of Pub. L. 101-239, 103 Stat. 2106 and section 7001 of Pub. L. 101-508, 104 Stat. 1388; subpart H also issued under 5 U.S.C. 1104; Sec. 842.810 also issued under Appendix C to Pub. L. 106-554, 114 Stat. 2763A-125.

Subpart B—Eligibility

■ 4. Section 842.213 is revised to read as follows:

§ 842.213 Voluntary early retirement—substantial delayering, reorganization, reduction in force, transfer of function, or other workforce restructuring.

(a) A *specific designee* is defined as a senior official within an agency who has been specifically designated to sign requests for voluntary early retirement authority under a designation from the head of the agency. Examples include a Chief Human Capital Officer, an Assistant Secretary for Administration, a Director of Human Resources Management, or other official.

(b) An agency's request for voluntary early retirement authority must be signed by the head of the agency or by a specific designee.

(c) The request must contain the following information:

(1) Identification of the agency or specified component(s) for which the authority is being requested;

(2) Reasons why the agency needs voluntary early retirement authority. This must include a detailed summary of the agency's personnel and/or budgetary situation that will result in an excess of personnel because of a substantial delayering, reorganization, reduction in force, transfer of function, or other workforce restructuring or reshaping, consistent with agency human capital goals;

(3) The date on which the agency expects to effect the substantial delayering, reorganization, reduction in force, transfer of function, or other workforce restructuring or reshaping;

(4) The time period during which the agency plans to offer voluntary early retirement;

(5) The total number of non-temporary employees in the agency (or specified component(s));

(6) The total number of non-temporary employees in the agency (or specified component(s)) who may be involuntarily separated, downgraded, transferred, or reassigned as a result of the substantial delayering, reorganization, reduction in force, transfer of function, or other workforce restructuring or reshaping;

(7) The total number of employees in the agency (or specified component(s)) who are eligible for voluntary early retirement;

(8) An estimate of the total number of employees in the agency (or specified component(s)) who are expected to retire early during the period covered by the request for voluntary early retirement authority; and

(9) A description of the types of personnel actions anticipated as a result of the agency's need for voluntary early retirement authority. Examples include

separations, transfers, reassignments, and downgradings.

(d) OPM will evaluate a request for voluntary early retirement based on:

(1) A specific request to OPM from the agency for voluntary early retirement authority;

(2) A voluntary separation incentive payment implementation plan, as discussed in part 576, subpart A, of this chapter, which must outline the intended use of the incentive payments and voluntary early retirement; or

(3) The agency's human capital plan, which must outline its intended use of voluntary separation incentive payments and voluntary early retirement authority, and the changes in organizational structure it expects to make as the result of projected separations and early retirements.

(e) Regardless of the method used, the request must include all of the information required by paragraph (c) of this section.

(f) OPM may approve an agency's request for voluntary early retirement authority to cover the entire period of the substantial delayering, reorganization, reduction in force, transfer of function, or other workforce restructuring or reshaping described by the agency, or the initial portion of that period with a requirement for subsequent information and justification if the period covers multiple years.

(g) After OPM approves an agency's request, the agency must immediately notify OPM of any subsequent changes in the conditions that served as the basis for the approval of the voluntary early retirement authority. Depending upon the circumstances involved, OPM will modify the authority as necessary to better suit the agency's needs.

(h) The agency may further limit voluntary early retirement offers based on:

(1) An established opening and closing date for the acceptance of applications that is announced to employees at the time of the offer; or

(2) The acceptance of a specified number of applications for voluntary early retirement, provided that, at the time of the offer, the agency notified employees that it retained the right to limit the number of voluntary early retirements.

(i) Within the timeframe specified for its approved voluntary early retirement authority, the agency may subsequently establish a new or revised closing date, or reduce or increase the number of early retirement applications it will accept, if management's downsizing and/or reshaping needs change. If the agency issues a revised closing date, or a revised number of applications to be

accepted, the new date or number of applications must be announced to the same group of employees included in the original announcement. If the agency issues a new window period with a new closing date, or a new instance of a specific number of applications to be accepted, the new window period or number of applications to be accepted may be announced to a different group of employees as long as they are covered by the approved voluntary early retirement authority.

(j) Chapter 43 of title 38, United States Code, requires that agencies treat employees on military duty, for all practical purposes, as though they were still on the job. Further, employees are not to be disadvantaged because of their military service. In accordance with these provisions, employees on military duty who would otherwise be eligible for an offer of voluntary early retirement will have 30 days following their return to duty to either accept or reject an offer of voluntary early retirement. This will be true even if the voluntary early retirement authority provided by OPM has expired.

(k) An employee who separates from the service voluntarily after completing 25 years of service, or becoming age 50 and completing 20 years of service, is entitled to an annuity if, on the date of separation, the employee:

(1) Is serving in a position covered by a voluntary early retirement offer; and
(2) Meets the following conditions which are covered in 5 U.S.C. 8414(b)(1)(B):

(i) Has been employed continuously, by the agency in which the employee is serving, for at least the 31-day period ending on the date on which such agency requests the determination referred to in section 842.213(b);

(ii) Is serving under an appointment that is not time limited;

(iii) Has not been duly notified that such employee is to be involuntarily separated for misconduct or unacceptable performance;

(iv) Is separated from the service voluntarily during a period in which, as determined by the Office of Personnel Management (upon request of the agency) under regulations prescribed by the Office:

(A) Such agency (or, if applicable, the component in which the employee is serving) is undergoing substantial delayering, substantial reorganization, substantial reductions in force, substantial transfer of function, or other substantial workforce restructuring (or shaping);

(B) A significant percentage of employees servicing in such agency (or

component) are likely to be separated or subject to an immediate reduction in the rate of basic pay (without regard to subchapter VI of chapter 53, or comparable provisions); or

(C) Identified as being in positions which are becoming surplus or excess to the agency's future ability to carry out its mission effectively; and

(v) As determined by the agency under regulations prescribed by the Office, is within the scope of the offer of voluntary early retirement, which may be made based on the following criteria:

(A) 1 or more organizational units;

(B) 1 or more occupational series or levels;

(C) 1 or more geographical locations;

(D) Specific periods;

(E) Skills, knowledge, or other factors related to a position; or

(F) Any appropriate combination of such factors.

(l) Agencies are responsible for ensuring that employees are not coerced into voluntary early retirement. If an agency finds any instances of coercion, it must take appropriate corrective action.

(m) Except as provided in paragraph (j) of this section, an agency may not offer or process voluntary early retirements beyond the stated expiration date of a voluntary early retirement authority or offer early retirements to employees who are not within the scope of the voluntary early retirement authority approved by OPM.

(n) OPM may terminate a voluntary early retirement authority if it determines that the condition(s) that formed the basis for the approval of the authority no longer exist.

(o) OPM may amend, limit, or terminate a voluntary early retirement authority to ensure that the requirements of this subpart are properly being followed.

(p) Agencies must provide OPM with interim and final reports for each voluntary early retirement authority, as covered in OPM's approval letter to the agency. OPM may suspend or cancel a voluntary early retirement authority if the agency is not in compliance with the reporting requirements or reporting schedule specified in OPM's voluntary early retirement authority approval letter.

[FR Doc. 04-13484 Filed 6-9-04; 5:03 pm]

BILLING CODE 6325-39-P

FEDERAL RESERVE SYSTEM

12 CFR Part 222

[Regulation V; Docket No. R-1187]

Fair Credit Reporting Act

AGENCY: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: The Board is publishing revisions to Regulation V, which implements the Fair Credit Reporting Act. The revisions add model notices that financial institutions may use to comply with the notice requirement relating to furnishing negative information contained in section 217 of the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act of 2003 (FACT Act). Section 217 of the FACT Act amends the FCRA to provide that if any financial institution extends credit and regularly and in the ordinary course of business furnishes information to a nationwide consumer reporting agency, and furnishes negative information to such an agency regarding credit extended to a customer, the institution must provide a clear and conspicuous notice about furnishing negative information, in writing, to the customer. Section 217 defines the term "financial institution" to have the same meaning as in the privacy provisions of the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act. The Board's model notices may be used by all financial institutions, as defined by section 217.

DATES: The rule is effective July 16, 2004.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Krista P. DeLargy, Senior Attorney, or David A. Stein, Counsel, Division of Consumer and Community Affairs, at (202) 452-3667 or 452-2412; or Thomas E. Scanlon, Counsel, Legal Division, at (202) 452-3594; for users of Telecommunications Device for the Deaf ("TDD") only, contact (202) 263-4869.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Background

On December 4, 2003, the President signed into law the FACT Act, which amends the FCRA. Pub. L. 108-159, 117 Stat. 1952. In general, the FACT Act enhances the ability of consumers to combat identity theft, increases the accuracy of consumer reports, and allows consumers to exercise greater control regarding the type and amount of marketing solicitations they receive. The FACT Act also restricts the use and disclosure of sensitive medical information. To bolster efforts to improve financial literacy among

consumers, the FACT Act creates a new Financial Literacy and Education Commission empowered to take appropriate actions to improve the financial literacy and education programs, grants, and materials of the Federal government. Lastly, the FACT Act establishes uniform national standards in key areas of regulation regarding consumer report information.

Section 217 of the FACT Act requires that if any financial institution (1) extends credit and regularly and in the ordinary course of business furnishes information to a nationwide consumer reporting agency, and (2) furnishes negative information to such an agency regarding credit extended to a customer, the institution must provide a clear and conspicuous notice about furnishing negative information, in writing, to the customer. Section 217 defines the term "negative information" to mean information concerning a customer's delinquencies, late payments, insolvency, or any form of default. The term "credit" is defined under the FACT Act to have the same meaning as in section 702 of the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, which defines "credit" to mean "the right granted by a creditor to a debtor to defer payment of debt or to incur debt and defer its payment or to purchase property or services and defer payment therefor." 15 U.S.C. 1691a. The provisions in Section 217 will become effective December 1, 2004. 69 FR 6526, (February 11, 2004).

Section 217 specifies that an institution must provide the required notice to the customer prior to, or no later than 30 days after, furnishing the negative information to a nationwide consumer reporting agency. After providing the notice, the institution may submit additional negative information to a nationwide consumer reporting agency with respect to the same transaction, extension of credit, account, or customer without providing additional notice to the customer. If a financial institution has provided a customer with a notice prior to the furnishing of negative information, the institution is not required to furnish negative information about the customer to a nationwide consumer reporting agency. A financial institution generally may provide the notice about furnishing negative information on or with any notice of default, any billing statement, or any other materials provided to the customer, so long as the notice is clear and conspicuous. Section 217 specifically provides, however, that the notice may not be included in the initial disclosures provided under section 127(a) of the Truth in Lending Act (15 U.S.C. 1637(a)).