

(b) The suspending official may, upon adequate evidence, also suspend a purchaser for any other cause so serious or compelling that it affects the present responsibility or a purchaser of Government timber.

§ 223.143 Procedures for suspension.

(a) *Investigation and referral.* Information which may be sufficient cause for suspension under § 223.142 shall be reported to the Forest Service Suspending Official. Generally, such information should be referred through the Forest Supervisor and the Regional Forester. The referral shall be accompanied by a complete statement of the facts supported by appropriate exhibits and a recommendation for action. Where the statement of facts indicates a possible criminal offense, except possible antitrust violations, the suspending official shall notify the Office of Inspector General, USDA. Where the statement of facts indicates a possible antitrust violation, the suspending official shall notify the Antitrust Division, Department of Justice.

(b) *Decisionmaking process*—(1) *Notice of suspension.* When a purchaser and any specifically named affiliates are suspended, the suspending official shall so advise the purchaser and any specifically named affiliate immediately by certified mail, return receipt requested. Such notice shall specify:

(i) That they have been suspended as of the date of the notice;

(ii) That the suspension is based on an indictment or other adequate evidence that the purchaser has committed irregularities,

(A) Of a serious nature in business dealings with the Government, or

(B) Seriously reflecting on the propriety of further Government dealings with the recipient;

(iii) Any such irregularities shall be described in terms sufficient to place the recipient on notice without disclosing the Government's evidence;

(iv) That the suspension is for a temporary period of time pending the completion of an investigation and such legal proceedings as may ensue;

(v) The cause(s) relied upon under § 223.142 for imposing suspension;

(vi) The effect of the suspension (see § 223.135);

(vii) The specific procedures governing suspension decisionmaking in § 223.143 (b)(1) through (b)(6).

(2) *Submission in opposition.* Within 30 calendar days after receipt of the notice of suspension, the purchaser or any specifically named affiliate may submit, in person, in writing, or through a representative, information and argument in opposition to the suspension, including any additional specific information that raises a genuine dispute over material facts.

(3) *Informal hearing.* Pursuant to paragraph (b)(2) of this section, respondent may request an informal hearing with the suspending official. The informal hearing shall be held within 20 calendar days from the date the request is received. The suspending official may postpone the date of the hearing if the respondent requests a postponement in writing. At the hearing, the respondent, appearing personally or through an attorney or other authorized representative, may informally present and explain evidence that causes for suspension do not exist, evidence of any mitigating factors, and arguments concerning the imposition, scope, duration or effects of suspension. A transcript of the informal hearing shall not be required.

(4) *Additional proceedings as to disputed material facts.* (i) If the suspending official finds that there exists a genuine dispute over facts material to the suspension, respondent(s) shall be afforded an opportunity to appear with counsel, submit documentary evidence, present witnesses, and confront any person the Forest Service presents, unless—

(A) The action is based on an indictment; or

(B) A determination is made, on the basis of Department of Justice advice, that the substantial interests of the Government in pending or contemplated legal proceedings based on the same facts as the suspension would be prejudiced.

(ii) If appropriate, the respondent may request a fact-finding conference on disputed material facts. Such a conference shall be held within 20 calendar days from the date the request is received unless mutually agreed otherwise. The fact-finding conference shall

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conform with the following requirements:

(A) At least 10 days before the fact-finding conference, the suspending official shall send the respondent a copy of all documents in the administrative record as of the date of transmittal and not objected to by the Department of Justice.

(B) At the conference, the respondent shall have the opportunity to appear with counsel, submit documentary evidence, present witnesses, and confront any person the Forest Service presents.

(iii) A transcribed record of any additional proceedings shall be prepared and made available at cost to the respondent upon request, unless the respondent and the Forest Service, by mutual agreement, waive the requirement for a transcript.

(5) *Suspending official's decision.* The suspending official may modify or terminate the suspension or leave it in force for the same reasons as for terminating or reducing the period or extent of debarment (see § 223.139(c)). The decision shall be made in accordance with the following provisions:

(i) *No additional proceedings necessary.* In actions based on an indictment, in which the respondent's submission does not raise a genuine dispute over material facts; or in which additional proceedings to determine disputed material facts have been denied on the basis of Department of Justice advice, the suspending official's decision shall be based on all the information in the administrative record, including any submissions and argument made by the respondent. The decision shall be made within 30 working days after receipt of any information and argument submitted by the respondent, unless the suspending official extends this period for good cause.

(ii) *Additional proceedings necessary.* (A) In actions in which additional proceedings are necessary as to disputed material facts, written findings of fact shall be promptly prepared. The suspending official shall base the decision on the facts as found, together with any information and argument submitted by the respondent and any other information in the administrative record.

(B) The suspending official may refer matters involving disputed material facts to another official for findings of fact. The suspending official may reject any such findings, in whole or in part, only after specifically determining them to be arbitrary and capricious or clearly erroneous.

(C) The suspending official's decision shall be made only after the conclusion of any proceedings with respect to disputed facts.

(6) *Notice of suspending official's decision.* The purchaser and any affiliates involved shall be given prompt written notice of the suspending officer's decision to continue or not continue the suspension by certified mail, return receipt requested.

§ 223.144 Period of suspension.

(a) Suspension shall be for a temporary period pending the completion of investigation and any ensuing legal proceedings unless sooner terminated by the suspending official or as provided in paragraph (b) of this section.

(b) If legal proceedings are not initiated within 12 months after the date of the suspension notice, the suspension shall be terminated unless an Assistant Attorney General requests its extension, in which case it may be extended for an additional 6 months. In no event may a suspension extend beyond 18 months, unless legal proceedings have been initiated within that period.

(c) The suspending official shall notify the Department of Justice of the proposed termination of any suspension, at least 30 days before the 12-month period expires, to give the Department an opportunity to request an extension.

§ 223.145 Scope of suspension.

The scope of suspension shall be the same as that for debarment (see § 223.140), except that the procedures in § 223.143 shall be used in imposing suspension.

Subpart D—Timber Export and Substitution Restrictions

§ 223.159 Scope and applicability.

The rules of this subpart apply to all timber sale contracts awarded before August 20, 1990, the date of enactment