

Environmental Protection Agency

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§ 13.22 Salary offset when EPA is the creditor agency.

(a) *Entitlement to notice, hearing, written response and decision.* (1) Prior to initiating collection action through salary offset, EPA will first provide the employee with the opportunity to pay in full the amount owed, unless such notification will compromise the Government's ultimate ability to collect the debt.

(2) Except as provided in paragraph (b) of this section, each employee from whom the Agency proposes to collect a debt by salary offset under this section is entitled to receive a written notice as described in paragraph (c) of this section.

(3) Each employee owing a debt to the United States which will be collected by salary offset is entitled to request a hearing on the debt. This request must be filed as prescribed in paragraph (d) of this section. The Agency will make appropriate hearing arrangements which are consistent with law and regulations. Where a hearing is held, the employee is entitled to a written decision on the following issues:

(i) The determination of the Agency concerning the existence or amount of the debt; and

(ii) The repayment schedule, if it was not established by written agreement between the employee and the Agency.

(b) *Exceptions to entitlement to notice, hearing, written response and final decision.* The procedural requirements of paragraph (a) of this section are not applicable to any adjustment of pay arising out of an employee's election of coverage or a change in coverage under a Federal benefits program (such as health insurance) requiring periodic deductions from pay, if the amount to be recovered was accumulated over four pay periods or less. However, if the amount to be recovered was accumulated over more than four pay periods the full procedures prescribed under paragraph (d) of this section will be extended to the employee.

(c) *Notification before deductions begin.* Except as provided in paragraph (b) of this section, deductions will not be made unless the employee is first provided with a minimum of 30 calendar days written notice. Notice will be sent

by certified mail (return receipt requested), and must include the following:

(1) The Agency's determination that a debt is owed, including the origin, nature, and amount of the debt;

(2) The Agency's intention to collect the debt by means of deductions from the employee's current disposable pay account;

(3) The amount, frequency, proposed beginning date and duration of the intended deductions. (The proposed beginning date for salary offset cannot be earlier than 30 days after the date of notice, unless this would compromise the Government's ultimate ability to resolve the debt);

(4) An explanation of the requirements concerning interest, penalty and administrative costs;

(5) The employee's right to inspect and copy all records relating to the debt or to request and receive a copy of such records;

(6) If not previously provided, the employee's right to enter into a written agreement for a repayment schedule differing from that proposed by the Agency where the terms of the proposed repayment schedule are acceptable to the Agency. (Such an agreement must be in writing and signed by both the employee and the appropriate EPA official and will be included in the employee's personnel file and documented in the EPA payroll system);

(7) The right to a hearing conducted by a hearing official not under the control of the Administrator, if a request is filed;

(8) The method and time for requesting a hearing;

(9) That the filing of a request for hearing within 15 days of receipt of the original notification will stay the assessment of interest, penalty and administrative costs and the commencement of collection proceedings;

(10) That a final decision on the hearing (if requested) will be issued at the earliest practical date, but no later than 60 days after the filing of the request, unless the employee requests and the hearing official grants a delay in the proceedings;

(11) That knowingly false or frivolous statements, representations or evidence may subject the employee to—

(i) Disciplinary procedures under 5 U.S.C. chapter 75 or any other applicable statutes or regulations;

(ii) Criminal penalties under 18 U.S.C. 286, 287, 1001 and 1002 or other applicable statutory authority; or

(iii) Penalties under the False Claims Act, 31 U.S.C. 3729-3731, or any other applicable statutory authority;

(12) Any other rights and remedies available under statutes or regulations governing the program for which the collection is being made; and

(13) That amounts paid or deducted for the debt, except administrative costs and penalty charges where the entire debt is not waived or terminated, which are later waived or found not owed to the United States will be promptly refunded to the employee.

(d) *Request for hearing.* An employee may request a hearing by filing a written request directly with the Director, Financial Management Division (2734R), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW., Washington, DC 20460. The request must state the bases upon which the employee disputes the proposed collection of the debt. The request must be signed by the employee and be received by EPA within 15 days of the employee's receipt of the notification of proposed deductions. The employee should submit in writing all facts, evidence and witnesses which support his/her position to the Director, Financial Management Division, within 15 days of the date of the request for a hearing. The Director, Financial Management Division, will arrange for the services of a hearing official not under the control of the Administrator and will provide the hearing official with all documents relating to the claim.

(e) *Requests for hearing made after time expires.* Late requests for a hearing may be accepted if the employee can show that the delay in filing the request for a hearing was due to circumstances beyond the employee's control.

(f) *Form of hearing, written response and final decision.* (1) Normally, a hearing will consist of the hearing official making a decision based upon a review of the claims file and any materials submitted by the debtor. However, in instances where the hearing official de-

termines that the validity of the debt turns on an issue of veracity or credibility which cannot be resolved through review of documentary evidence, the hearing official at his discretion may afford the debtor an opportunity for an oral hearing. Such oral hearings will consist of an informal conference before a hearing official in which the employee and the Agency will be given the opportunity to present evidence, witnesses and argument. If desired, the employee may be represented by an individual of his/her choice. The Agency shall maintain a summary record of oral hearings provided under these procedures.

(2) Written decisions provided after a request for hearing will, at a minimum, state the facts evidencing the nature and origin of the alleged debt; and the hearing official's analysis, findings and conclusions.

(3) The decision of the hearing official is final and binding on the parties.

(g) *Request for waiver.* In certain instances, an employee may have a statutory right to request a waiver of overpayment of pay or allowances, e.g., 5 U.S.C. 5584 or 5 U.S.C. 5724(i). When an employee requests waiver consideration under a right authorized by statute, further collection on the debt will be suspended until a final administrative decision is made on the waiver request. However, where it appears that the Government's ability to recover the debt may be adversely affected because of the employee's resignation, termination or other action, suspension of recovery is not required. During the period of the suspension, interest, penalty charges and administrative costs will not be assessed against the debt. The Agency will not duplicate, for purposes of salary offset, any of the procedures already provided the debtor under a request for waiver.

(h) *Method and source of collection.* A debt will be collected in a lump-sum or by installment deductions at established pay intervals from an employee's current pay account, unless the employee and the Agency agree to alternative arrangements for payment. The alternative payment schedule must be in writing, signed by both the employee and the Administrator and

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will be documented in the Agency's files.

(i) *Limitation on amount of deduction.* The size and frequency of installment deductions generally will bear a reasonable relation to the size of the debt and the employee's ability to pay. However, the amount deducted for any period may not exceed 15 percent of the disposable pay from which the deduction is made, unless the employee has agreed in writing to the deduction of a greater amount. If possible, the installment payments will be in amounts sufficient to liquidate the debt in three years or less. Installment payments of less than \$25 normally will be accepted only in the most unusual circumstances.

(j) *Duration of deduction.* If the employee is financially unable to pay a debt in a lump-sum or the amount of the debt exceeds 15 percent of disposable pay, collection will be made in installments. Installment deductions will be made over the period of active duty or employment except as provided in paragraph (a)(1) of this section.

(k) *When deductions may begin.* (1) Deductions to liquidate an employee's debt will begin on the date stated in the Agency's notice of intention to collect from the employee's current pay unless the debt has been repaid or the employee has filed a timely request for hearing on issues for which a hearing is appropriate.

(2) If the employee has filed a timely request for hearing with the Agency, deductions will begin after the hearing official has provided the employee with a final written decision indicating the amount owed the Government. Following the decision by the hearing official, the employee will be given 30 days to repay the amount owed prior to collection through salary offset, unless otherwise provided by the hearing official.

(l) *Liquidation from final check.* If the employee retires, resigns, or the period of employment ends before collection of the debt is completed, the remainder of the debt will be offset from subsequent payments of any nature due the employee (e.g., final salary payment, lump-sum leave, etc.).

(m) *Recovery from other payments due a separated employee.* If the debt cannot

be liquidated by offset from any final payment due the employee on the date of separation, EPA will liquidate the debt, where appropriate, by administrative offset from later payments of any kind due the former employee (e.g., retirement pay). Such administrative offset will be taken in accordance with the procedures set forth in § 13.20.

(n) *Employees who transfer to another Federal agency.* If an EPA employee transfers to another Federal agency prior to repaying a debt owed to EPA, the following action will be taken:

(1) The appropriate debt-claim form specified by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) will be completed and certified to the new paying office by EPA. EPA will certify: That the employee owes a debt; the amount and the basis for the debt; the date on which payment is due; the date the Government's rights to collect the debt first accrued; and that EPA's regulations implementing 5 U.S.C. 5514 have been approved by OPM.

(2) The new paying agency will be advised of the amount which has already been collected, the number of installments and the commencement date for the first installment, if other than the next officially established pay period. EPA will also identify to the new paying agency the actions it has taken and the dates of such actions.

(3) EPA will place or will arrange to have placed in the employee's official personnel file the information required by paragraphs (n) (1) and (2) of this section.

(4) Upon receipt of the official personnel file from EPA, the new paying agency will resume collection from the employee's current pay account and will notify both the employee and EPA of the resumption.

(o) *Interest, penalty and administrative cost.* EPA will assess interest and administrative costs on debts collected under these procedures. The following guidelines apply to the assessment of these costs on debts collected by salary offset:

(1) A processing and handling charge will be assessed on debts collected through salary offset under this section. Where offset begun prior to the

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employee's receipt of the 30-day written notice of the proposed offset, processing and handling costs will only be assessed after the expiration of the 30-day notice period and after the completion of any hearing requested under paragraph (d) of this section or waiver consideration under paragraph (g) of this section.

(2) Interest will be assessed on all debts not collected within 30 days of either the date of the notice where the employee has not requested a hearing within the allotted time, completion of a hearing pursuant to paragraph (d) of this section, or completion of waiver consideration under paragraph (g) of this section, whichever is later. Interest will continue to accrue during the period of the recovery.

(3) Deductions by salary offset normally begin prior to the time for assessment of a penalty. Therefore, a penalty charge will not be assessed unless deductions occur more than 120 days from the date of notice to the debtor and penalty assessments have not been suspended because of waiver consideration by EPA.

(p) *Non-waiver of right by payment.* An employee's payment under protest of all or any portion of a debt does not waive any rights which the employee may have under either these procedures or any other provision of law.

(q) *Refunds.* EPA will promptly refund to the employee amounts paid or deducted pursuant to this section, the recovery of which is subsequently waived or otherwise found not owing to the United States. Refunds do not bear interest unless specifically authorized by law.

(r) *Time limit for commencing recovery by salary setoff.* EPA will not initiate salary offset to collect a debt more than 10 years after the Government's right to collect the debt first accrued, unless facts material to the right to collect the debt were not known and could not have been known through the exercise of reasonable care by the Government official responsible for discovering and collecting such debts.

§ 13.23 Salary offset when EPA is not the creditor agency.

The requirements below apply when EPA has been requested to collect a

debt owed by an EPA employee to another Federal agency.

(a) *Format for the request for recovery.*

(1) The creditor agency must complete fully the appropriate claim form specified by OPM.

(2) The creditor agency must certify to EPA on the debt claim form: The fact that the employee owes a debt; the date that the debt first accrued; and that the creditor agency's regulations implementing 5 U.S.C. 5514 have been approved by OPM and send it to the Director, Financial Management Division (2734R), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW., Washington, DC 20460.

(3) If the collection is to be made in installments, the creditor agency must also advise EPA of the number of installments to be collected, the amount of each installment, and the commencement date of the first installment, if a date other than the next established pay period.

(4) Unless the employee has consented in writing to the salary deductions or signed a statement acknowledging receipt of the required procedures and this information is attached to the claim form, the creditor agency must indicate the actions it took under its procedures for salary offset and the dates of such actions.

(b) *Processing of the claim by EPA—(1) Incomplete claims.* If EPA receives an improperly completed claim form, the claim form and all accompanying material will be returned to the requesting (creditor) agency with notice that OPM procedures must be followed and a properly completed claim form must be received before any salary offset can be taken. The notice should identify specifically what is needed from the requesting agency for the claim to be processed.

(2) *Complete claims.* If the claim procedures in paragraph (a) of this section have been properly completed, deduction will begin on the next established pay period. EPA will not review the merits of the creditor agency's determinations with respect to the amount or validity of the debt as stated in the debt claim form. EPA will not assess a handling or any other related charge to cover the cost of its processing the claim.