# Thrift Savings Plan BULLETIN for Service TSP Representatives

Subject: TSP Contribution Limits for 2012

Date: December 21, 2011

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has announced the contribution limits for 2012. These limits affect the amount of contributions participants can make to the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) for the year. The annual limit for elective deferrals will increase from $16,500 in 2011 to $17,000 in 2012. For TSP purposes, elective deferrals refer to employee contributions that are made on a tax-deferred basis. The limit for catch-up contributions will remain at $5,500 in 2012. In addition, the Internal Revenue Code (IRC) 415(c) annual addition limit applies to uniformed services members who make tax-exempt contributions to the TSP while deployed in a designated combat zone. The annual addition limit will increase from $49,000 in 2011 to $50,000 in 2012.

**Elective Deferral Limit**

Participants may elect to contribute any percentage of basic, incentive, special, and bonus pay to the TSP. However, the TSP is not allowed to accept a contribution that exceeds the elective deferral limit. When a participant reaches the elective deferral limit, the TSP will notify the payroll office, instructing it to stop submitting tax-deferred contributions and to restart them with the first paycheck in the following year. Participants who wish to make a TSP contribution for each pay date throughout the year may want to use the Elective Deferral Calculator located in the Calculators section of the TSP website at www.tsp.gov.

Upon implementation of Roth TSP in the second quarter of 2012, the total amount the participant contributes from his or her pay to the TSP in traditional tax-deferred **and/or** Roth contributions (deducted on an after-tax basis or from tax-exempt pay) may not exceed the amount the IRS sets as the elective deferral limit ($17,000 for 2012).

**Catch-Up Contributions Limit**

Participants who will make regular contributions to the TSP or an equivalent employer plan up to the maximum amount allowed by the IRC, and who will be age 50 or older in 2012, may make a separate election to contribute an additional amount, called catch-up contributions. These contributions are tax-deferred, but do not count toward the elective deferral

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**Inquiries:** Questions concerning this bulletin should be directed to the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board at **202-942-1460**.

**Chapter:** This bulletin may be filed in Chapter 2, General Information.

limit described above. However, they have their own limit: $5,500 in 2011 and 2012. Eligible participants elect a whole dollar amount from basic pay. A new election must be made each year. Age-eligible participants who elect to contribute the maximum in regular contributions to the TSP and to make a catch-up election have the opportunity to defer up to $22,000 in 2011 and $22,500 in 2012 in their TSP accounts. Catch-up contributions are currently contributed from pre-tax income. Age-eligible participants deployed to a designated combat zone who elect catch-up contributions must earn taxable income in order to make a tax-deferred catch-up contribution to the TSP. Consequently, age-eligible members who receive 100% tax-exempt income while deployed in a combat zone do not have the pre-tax income available to make catch-up contributions.

Upon implementation of Roth TSP contributions in the second quarter of 2012, age-eligible participants may elect Roth catch-up contributions to the TSP from pay on an after-tax basis. In addition, participants may make Roth catch-up contributions from tax-exempt basic pay. For 2012, the combined traditional (tax-deferred) and Roth (deducted on an after-tax basis or from tax-exempt pay) catch-up contributions made to the TSP during the calendar year cannot exceed the catch-up limit of $5,500.

**Limits for Participants with Both Civilian and Uniformed Services TSP Accounts**

For participants who contribute to both a civilian and a uniformed services TSP account during the year, the elective deferral and catch-up contribution limits apply to the combined amounts of tax-deferred contributions (and when they are implemented, Roth contributions) in both accounts. During the year, the TSP will apply the limits separately to each account. In January of the following year, the TSP will determine whether either limit was exceeded in the combination of the two accounts. If the participant exceeds a limit, the TSP will deduct the excess amount and attributable earnings pro rata from the participant's uniformed services TSP account, and will send the participant a check for this amount. The participant must report the tax-deferred portion of contributions refunded to him or her as income for the year in which he or she made the contributions; Roth contributions returned are already reported as taxable income on the IRS Form W-2 generated by the agency or service. The participant must report the earnings refunded to him or her as income in the year the TSP pays the earnings.

Payroll offices must not change the deferral amounts in block 12 of IRS Form W-2 for participants who exceed the elective deferral or catch-up contributions limit by contributing to a civilian and a uniformed services TSP account. Instead, the TSP will send the participant an IRS Form 1099-R for the excess contributions and a separate IRS Form 1099-R for the earnings in January following the year the excess contributions were returned.

**Limits for Participants Who Contributed to an Equivalent Employer Plan and the TSP**

The elective deferral and catch-up limits apply to contributions participants make to the TSP and equivalent employer plans (e.g., 401(k), 403(a), or 403(b) plans). Participants who exceed these limits by contributing to more than one employer plan may request a refund of excess deferrals from the TSP for the amount of contributions above these limits. In January 2012, the TSP will provide the Request for Refund of Excess Contributions form with the

Fact Sheet, Annual Limit on Elective Deferrals. The TSP must receive a participant's request for a refund of 2011 excess elective deferrals no later than March 31, 2012. The TSP cannot process requests received after this date. Services should refer affected participants to the TSP website at www.tsp.gov for more information.

**Annual Addition Limit (IRC Section 415(c))**

Participants who contribute to the TSP while deployed in a designated combat zone are subject to the annual addition limit under section 415(c) of the IRC. The member makes tax-exempt contributions to the TSP from pay earned in a combat zone. The tax-exempt contributions are not included in the elective deferral limit, but become part of the IRC 415(c) annual addition limit: $49,000 in 2011, and $50,000 in 2012. Participants who contribute to their civilian and uniformed services TSP accounts are subject to the annual addition limit. When a participant becomes subject to the annual addition limit, the total traditional tax-deferred, Roth (when implemented), and traditional tax-exempt contributions to the participant's uniformed services and civilian TSP accounts are part of that limit. If the participant has Agency Automatic (1%) and Matching Contributions, these also count towards the annual addition limit. However, catch-up contributions are not included in the annual addition limit.

The TSP will apply the same process to the IRC 415(c) annual addition limit as it does to returning other excess contributions; it will return the excess amount from the contributions made to the participant's uniformed services TSP account. The TSP will first return tax-exempt contributions. If the tax-exempt contributions were less than the amount the TSP is required to return, the TSP will return the remainder of the excess amount pro rata from the participant's tax-deferred and Roth contributions. The amount returned will include earnings attributable to these excess contributions. The participant must report the tax-deferred amount returned as income for the year in which the contributions were made. The participant must report the earnings as income in the year the TSP returns the earnings. Tax-exempt contributions returned to the participant are not taxable as income; Roth contributions returned to the participant were subject to taxation by the agency or service when they were deducted from pay and are already reflected as taxable income earned on the IRS Form W-2 generated by the agency or service. However, the earnings on these contributions are taxable in the year the TSP returns them.

Payroll offices must not change the TSP contribution amounts in block 12 of IRS Form W-2 for participants who exceed the annual addition limit. Instead, the TSP will send the participant an IRS Form 1099-R for the excess contributions and a separate IRS Form 1099-R for the earnings in the January following the year the excess contributions were returned.

Participants who would like more information on how the limit applies to their civilian and uniformed services TSP accounts should refer to the Contribution Limits section under Plan Participation, Eligibility and Contributions, on the TSP website.

Additional information about the TSP's Roth feature will be issued to services in the first quarter of 2012, prior to implementation.

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