

| | Percent |
|---|---------|
| For economic injury: Businesses and small agricultural cooperatives without credit available elsewhere | 4.000 |

The numbers assigned to this disaster for physical damage are 289106 for Tennessee and 289206 for Georgia.

For economic injury the numbers are 916800 for Tennessee and 916900 for Georgia.

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Program Nos. 59002 and 59008)

Date: August 29, 1996.

John T. Spotila,

Acting Administrator.

[FR Doc. 96-22897 Filed 9-6-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 8025-01-P

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Research Plan For the Development of a Redesigned Method of Evaluating Disability in Social Security Claims

AGENCY: Social Security Administration (SSA).

ACTION: Notice and solicitation of comments.

SUMMARY: SSA has formulated a research plan for developing a new method of determining whether an individual is "disabled," as defined in the Social Security Act (the Act), for purposes of entitlement or eligibility to disability benefits under titles II and XVI of the Act. The goal of this research will be to devise a more efficient and more accurate method for making timely determinations of disability for Social Security claimants. This notice describes SSA's research plan for developing the new methodology.

DATES: To be considered, all comments must be received in writing on or before October 24, 1996.

ADDRESSES: Please submit comments on the research plan in one of the following manners:

- By E-mail, to David.Barnes@ssa.gov
- By telefax, to 410-966-0148
- By mail, to Disability Process

Redesign Staff, Office of Disability, Social Security Administration, 6401 Security Boulevard, Room 560 Altmeier, Baltimore MD 21235.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT: David Barnes, 410-965-9121.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

In late 1993, the Social Security Administration (SSA) began an initiative to improve its disability

process through business reengineering, which involves redesigning the business process to improve efficiency and service to the customers. In September 1994, the Commissioner of Social Security issued a report on SSA's disability process redesign entitled *Plan for a New Disability Claim Process*. That report discussed the need for a structured approach to disability decisionmaking that takes into consideration the large number of claims (2.7 million initial disability decisions in fiscal year 1994) and still provides a basis for consistent, equitable decisionmaking by adjudicators at each level of review.

The Commissioner described a proposal for a new method for determining whether individuals are "disabled" under the Social Security Act (the Act) with a goal of focusing decisionmaking on the functional consequences of an individual's medically determined impairments. However, she also acknowledged that certain aspects of the proposed new disability methodology would require much study and deliberation.

A November 1994 follow-up report, *Disability Process Redesign: Next Steps in Implementation*, discussed effectuation of the new disability claim process. The report noted that long-term research, consultation, development, and refinement will be needed in order to decide on and implement a new disability decision methodology.

Integration of Disability Evaluation Study and Disability Redesign Research

In response to concerns about growth in the disability rolls, SSA began research in early 1993 to identify factors contributing to this growth. One major research question remains unanswered:

How many adults in the U.S. are "disabled," based on SSA criteria? (Existing estimates of the number of disabled vary widely because they are based on small sub-groups within the population, varying definitions of "disability," and less reliable self-reports.)

To provide reliable estimates of the number of disabled adults, SSA has developed plans for a national survey, the Disability Evaluation Study (DES), which would include not only survey questions, but also physical and/or mental examination(s) and current medical records.

The DES will be in the field as SSA develops a new disability decision methodology. By integrating the DES with these plans to develop a new disability decision methodology, SSA will be able to use DES data to estimate the number of adults with disabilities in the United States, and also to collect the

data needed to test the new proposed disability decision methodology.

More comprehensively, the DES will attempt to answer four fundamental questions:

(1) Would the types of people found disabled be affected by any change in disability decision methodology?

(2) Why can some persons with disabling impairments work, while others cannot?

(3) How many adults who meet SSA's definition of disability (irrespective of work status) are in the population?

(4) How can SSA cost-effectively monitor, for program planning purposes, future changes in the U.S. population of people who meet SSA's definition of disability?

The DES will attempt to answer these questions by screening a nationally representative sample of adults aged 18 to 69 in order to identify those with either self-identified diagnoses or other positive indicators of physical or mental impairment(s). For those screened in, the DES will collect sufficient data for accurate predictions of whether they would be found disabled under both current SSA criteria and the proposed new disability decision methodology.

The disability methodology research and DES will feed into each other in a variety of ways. In general terms, the DES design will reflect input from the disability methodology research and, to the extent that it can be specified, the new disability methodology itself. During a planned Stage 1, the DES will gather a wide range of information on functioning of individuals with physical and mental impairments and will include functional assessment measures that appear to have potential for eventual use in a functionally-based decision process. In Stage 2, the DES can field-test proposed functional assessment measures and decision processes on a nationally representative sample, perhaps concurrently with planned methodology laboratory testing.

In effect, the results and findings from DES Stage 1 and several other research projects will assist in the development of a proposed decision methodology that can be tested in Stage 2 of the DES. Further, the initial work to develop and implement Stage 1, conducted by SSA in conjunction with the expert staff of the eventual DES contractor, will provide additional relevant information to complement the output of the methodology research. It is also likely that, even before the full DES sample has been evaluated, certain findings that emerge from the field work will provide useful input for decisions on the new methodology.

Critical elements of the integrated research process will be:

- The combined product of two research projects on (1) functional assessment tools and (2) occupational classification systems. This will provide a comprehensive review and analysis of existing tools and systems, and also provide a basis for further research, which will allow SSA to make informed judgments about an appropriate way(s) of assessing functional capacity and how an individual's functional capacities relate to capacity for work.

- Two additional comprehensive research programs addressing disability methodology issues other than functional capacity measurement. Information derived from these programs will be used to develop the new proposed disability decision methodology. These programs are:

1. A survey of existing systems and methods of identifying disabled individuals (such as foreign and other domestic disability programs using functionally based methodologies, existing methods of screening in or screening out clear-cut cases, comparable to the proposed steps for use in the SSA disability determinations). The survey will provide an overview of how other disability programs address similar methodology problems; and

2. An analysis of the relationship between vocational factors (age, education, and work experience) and an individual's ability to work, which will be considered in making policy decisions on how to incorporate the statutorily-required consideration of such vocational factors into the new methodology.

- A project management approach [see Organization, below] that provides senior executive oversight, multi-level involvement of outside consultants, and both internal and external stakeholder consultation.

- Methodology laboratories, which will allow testing, in a controlled setting, of proposed components of a new methodology (e.g., specific functional assessment tools, proposed screening mechanisms). The laboratory setting and testing procedures will vary depending on the issue under investigation. Data from this testing will help to narrow choices among possible policy options by developing empirical data on which to base policy decisions.

- DES Stage 1 and Stage 2 data, which can provide a focused analysis of a new disability methodology in a nationally representative sample.

Organization

The organizational structure supporting the disability decision methodology research will have seven components:

A. Steering Committee

A three-person Steering Committee consisting of executives from SSA's Office of Disability (OD), Office of Research, Evaluation and Statistics (ORES), and Disability Process Redesign Team (DPRT) will be charged with overall supervision of the project. The Steering Committee will be advised by an Expert Panel and will delegate day-to-day management and operation of the project to a Research Workgroup.

B. Independent Review and Oversight

SSA intends to enter a contractual relationship with the National Academy of Sciences (NAS). NAS will review the overall research design, as well as specific research plans and products, and will advise the Steering Committee on all aspects of the project.

C. Research Workgroup

The Research Workgroup will be composed of OD, ORES, and DPRT staff, possibly supplemented by one or more consultants from outside SSA (see section D below). The Workgroup will direct day-to-day operation of all aspects of the project. Subject to Steering Committee oversight and direction, the Research Workgroup will review research products, develop laboratory testing scenarios, oversee laboratory testing, review test results, and identify and address policy options.

The Research Workgroup will rely on four sources for advice and comment: Consultants, Internal Stakeholders, External Stakeholders, and the General Public. Any recommendations of the Research Workgroup are subject to review and approval of the Steering Committee.

D. Consultants

We will contract with experts in relevant fields including medicine, disability, rehabilitation, health research, and research methodology, to review and evaluate research plans and products, recommend additional research activities, consult on the design of testing laboratories, etc. They will be selected for their expertise in one of the preceding subject areas, and they will provide advice to the research workgroup on an individual basis.

E. Internal Stakeholders

Internal Stakeholders will be individual representatives from other interested or affected SSA components

(e.g., State Disability Determination Services, Field Offices, Office of Program and Integrity Reviews, Office of Systems, Office of Hearings and Appeals). They will review and comment on specific aspects of the project. Internal Stakeholders will be identified by their respective components.

F. External Stakeholders

External Stakeholders will be individuals and organizations, many of whom already interact with SSA, with a special interest in SSA disability programs. They will not meet or operate as a single entity, but will individually review and comment on major activities and products mailed to them. Individuals or organizations interested in being considered External Stakeholders should submit their request to the contact point listed above.

G. General Public

The Research Workgroup will seek, receive, and consider comments from the general public through a series of notices published in the Federal Register. The notices will describe the Agency's research goals and plans, discuss major developments in the research process (e.g., results of research activities, Research Workgroup and Steering Committee decisions, laboratory test procedures and results), and invite public comment. If necessary, the Research Workgroup will consider organizing public hearings or asking contractors to convene groups or to hold public forums.

Process

SSA is committed to conducting this research in an inclusive environment. To that end, SSA is simultaneously publishing this notice in the Federal Register and sending the same notice to a comprehensive list of Internal and External Stakeholders.

At major milestones in the research and development process when consultant and/or stakeholder input is appropriate (e.g., receipt of a research product or laboratory test result, change in research plans, preliminary policy decision), SSA will publish a Federal Register notice, including a request for comments, and transmit the same notice to External Stakeholders.

SSA also will present the same issue(s) to the Consultants for advice and, as needed, to some or all of the Internal Stakeholders for comment.

Upon completion of all research actions, a report will be made to the Commissioner making final recommendations for the new disability methodology.

Time Line

| Action | Date |
|---|-------------|
| Development of Research Plan | Completed. |
| Publication of Research Plan in Federal Register ; Request for Internal and External Stakeholder Comments | 8/96. |
| Completion of Initial Research on Functional Assessment Instruments | 11/96. |
| Federal Register Notice Describing Initial Research Products; Request for Internal and External Stakeholder Comments | 1/97. |
| Award of DES Contract | 7/97. |
| Further Research (Other Disability Programs, Vocational Factors); Laboratory Testing; DES Stage 1 Field Work Begins | 7/97-9/97. |
| Federal Register Notice Describing Further Research and Testing; Request for Internal and External Stakeholder Comments | 9/97. |
| Supplemental Research (as needed) and Testing; DES Stage 1 Field Work | 1/98-9/98. |
| Federal Register Notice Describing Supplemental Research and Testing Based on Results to Date; Request for Internal and External Stakeholder Comments. | 9/98. |
| Review of All Research, Comments, and Testing in Conjunction with DES Stage 1 Data; DES Stage 2 Field Work | 10/98-10/99 |
| FEDERAL REGISTER Notice Describing DES Research Including Interim Results; Request for Internal and External Stakeholder Comments. | 11/99 |
| Final Review of All Research, Testing, Comments, and DES Data; Recommendation of Final Disability Decision Methodology | 11/99-12/99 |

Dated: August 30, 1996.
 John Dyer,
Acting, Principal Deputy Commissioner of Social Security.
 [FR Doc. 96-22925 Filed 9-6-96; 8:45 am]
BILLING CODE 4190-29-P

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Coast Guard

[CGD08-96-040]

Houston/Galveston Navigation Safety Advisory Committee Meeting

AGENCY: Coast Guard, DOT.
ACTION: Notice of full committee meeting.

SUMMARY: The Houston/Galveston Navigation Safety Advisory Committee (HOGANSAC) will meet to discuss waterway improvements, aids to navigation, current meters, and various other navigation safety matters affecting the Houston/Galveston area. All meetings will be open to the public.

DATES: The meeting of HOGANSAC will be held on Thursday, October 3, 1996 from 9:30 a.m. to approximately 1 p.m. Members of the public may present written or oral statements at the meetings.

ADDRESSES: The HOGANSAC meeting will be held in the conference room of the Houston Pilots Office, 8150 South Loop East, Houston, Texas.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Captain K. Eldridge, Executive Director of HOGANSAC, telephone (713) 671-5101, or Commander P. Carroll, Executive Secretary of HOGANSAC, telephone (713) 671-5164.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Notice of this meeting is given pursuant to the Federal Advisory Committee Act, 5 U.S.C. App. 2.

Agenda of the Meeting

Houston/Galveston Navigation Safety Advisory Committee (HOGANSAC). The tentative agenda includes the following:

- (1) Introductory remarks by the new sponsor (Rear Admiral T. W. Josiah) and Executive Director (Captain K. Eldridge).
- (2) Approval of the May 23, 1996 minutes.
- (3) Report from the Navigation Subcommittee.
- (4) Report from the Waterways Subcommittee.

Procedural

All meetings are open to the public. Members of the public may make oral presentations during the meetings.

Information on Services for the Handicapped

For information on facilities or services for the handicapped or to request special assistance at the meetings, contact the Executive Director as soon as possible.

Dated: August 23, 1996.
 T.W. Josiah,
Rear Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard, Commander, Eighth Coast Guard District.
 [FR Doc. 96-22948 Filed 9-6-96; 8:45 am]
BILLING CODE 4910-14-M

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Research and Development Programs Meeting Agenda

AGENCY: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, DOT.
ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: This notice provides the agenda for a public meeting at which the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) will describe

and discuss specific research and development projects.

DATES AND TIMES: As previously announced, NHTSA will hold a public meeting devoted primarily to presentations of specific research and development projects on September 11, 1996, beginning at 1:30 p.m. and ending at approximately 5:00 p.m.

ADDRESS: The meeting will be held at the Tysons Westpark Hotel, 8401 Westpark Drive, McLean, Virginia 22102.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This notice provides the agenda for the fourteenth in a series of public meetings to provide detailed information about NHTSA's research and development programs. This meeting will be held on September 11, 1996. The meeting was announced on August 13, 1996 (61 FR 42083). For additional information about the meeting consult that announcement.

Starting at 1:30 p.m. and concluding by 5:00 p.m., NHTSA's Office of Research and Development will discuss the following topics:

- Air bag assessment research,
- Status of ejection mitigation research,
- Improved frontal crash protection—update on oblique moving barrier testing,
- Preliminary estimates of safety benefits for ITS collision avoidance systems,
- National Center for Statistics and Analysis information services,
- National Accident Sampling System (NASS) status report,
- Pedestrian special NASS study,
- On-line tracking system for NHTSA's research projects.

NHTSA has based its decisions about the agenda, in part, on the suggestions it received by August 22, 1996, in response to the announcement published August 13, 1996.

As announced on August 13, 1996, in the time remaining at the conclusion of