

impairment-related work expenses) is ordinarily considered to be engaging in SGA. The Social Security amendments of 1977 established a higher SGA amount for statutorily blind individuals by setting their monthly SGA amount to the monthly exempt amount for persons aged 65 through 69 under the retirement earnings test provisions of the Act. As mentioned earlier, section 102 of Pub. L. 104-121 increased the exempt amount for persons aged 65 through 69 to specific levels for 1996-2002. Section 102 further provided that the SGA amount for blind individuals be the same as it would have been if section 102 had not been enacted. Thus, the monthly SGA amount for blind individuals in 1996 is \$960—the same as the monthly exempt amount for persons aged 65 through 69 promulgated in the Federal Register on October 25, 1995 (60 FR 54751).

Computation. Under the formula in section 203(f)(8)(B) in effect prior to the enactment of Pub. L. 104-121, the monthly SGA amount for statutorily blind individuals for 1997 shall be the larger of (1) such amount for 1996 or (2) such amount for 1994 multiplied by the ratio of the national average wage index for 1995 to that for 1992. The ratio of the national average wage index for 1995, \$24,705.66 as determined above, compared to that for 1992, \$22,935.42, is 1.0771837. Section 203(f)(8)(B) further provides that if the amount so determined is not a multiple of \$10, it shall be rounded to the nearest multiple of \$10.

SGA Amount for Statutorily Blind Individuals. Multiplying the 1994 monthly SGA amount for statutorily blind individuals of \$930 by the ratio of 1.0771837 produces the amount of \$1,001.78. This must then be rounded to \$1,000. Because \$1,000 is larger than the current amount of \$960, the monthly SGA amount for statutorily blind individuals is determined to be \$1,000 for 1997.

Domestic Employee Coverage Threshold

General. Section 2 of the "Social Security Domestic Employment Reform Act of 1994" (Pub. L. 103-387) increased the threshold for coverage of a domestic employee's wages paid per employer from \$50 per calendar quarter to \$1,000 in calendar year 1994. The statute holds the coverage threshold at the \$1,000 level for 1995 and then increases the threshold in \$100 increments for years after 1995. The formula for increasing the threshold is provided in section 3121(x) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Computation. Under the new formula, the domestic employee coverage threshold amount for 1997 shall be equal to the 1995 amount of \$1,000 multiplied by the ratio of the national average wage index for 1995 to that for 1993. The national average wage index for 1993 was previously determined to be \$23,132.67. The national average wage index for 1995 is \$24,705.66 as determined above. If the amount so determined is not a multiple of \$100, it shall be rounded to the next lower multiple of \$100.

Domestic Employee Coverage Threshold Amount. The ratio of the national average wage index for 1995, \$24,705.66, compared to that for 1993, \$23,132.67, is 1.0679986. Multiplying the 1995 domestic employee coverage threshold amount of \$1,000 by the ratio of 1.0679986 produces the amount of \$1,068.00, which must then be rounded to \$1,000. Accordingly, the domestic employee coverage threshold amount is determined to be \$1,000 for 1997.

OASDI Fund Ratio

General. Section 215(i) of the Act provides for automatic cost-of-living increases in OASDI benefit amounts. This section also includes a "stabilizer" provision that can limit the automatic OASDI benefit increase under certain circumstances. If the combined assets of the OASI and DI Trust Funds, as a percentage of annual expenditures, are below a specified threshold, the automatic benefit increase is equal to the lesser of (1) the increase in the national average wage index or (2) the increase in prices. The threshold specified for the OASDI fund ratio is 20.0 percent for benefit increases for December of 1989 and later. The law also provides for subsequent "catch-up" benefit increases for beneficiaries whose previous benefit increases were affected by this provision. "Catch-up" benefit increases can occur only when trust fund assets exceed 32.0 percent of annual expenditures.

Computation. Section 215(i) specifies the computation and application of the OASDI fund ratio. The OASDI fund ratio for 1996 is the ratio of (1) the combined assets of the OASI and DI Trust Funds at the beginning of 1996 to (2) the estimated expenditures of the OASI and DI Trust Funds during 1996, excluding transfer payments between the OASI and DI Trust Funds, and reducing any transfers to the Railroad Retirement Account by any transfers from that account into either trust fund.

Ratio. The combined assets of the OASI and DI Trust Funds at the beginning of 1996 equaled \$496,068 million, and the expenditures are

estimated to be \$354,615 million. Thus, the OASDI fund ratio for 1996 is 139.9 percent, which exceeds the applicable threshold of 20.0 percent. Therefore, the stabilizer provision does not affect the benefit increase for December 1996. Although the OASDI fund ratio exceeds the 32.0-percent threshold for potential "catch-up" benefit increases, no past benefit increase has been reduced under the stabilizer provision. Thus, no "catch-up" benefit increase is required.

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance: Program Nos. 96.001 Social Security—Disability Insurance; 96.002 Social Security—Retirement Insurance; 96.003 Social Security—Special Benefits for Persons Aged 72 and Over; 96.004 Social Security—Survivors Insurance; 96.006 Supplemental Security Income.)

Dated: October 18, 1996.

Shirley S. Chater,

Commissioner, Social Security Administration.

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OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES TRADE REPRESENTATIVE

Generalized System of Preferences (GSP); 1995 Annual Review Public Hearings Site

AGENCY: Office of the United States Trade Representative.

ACTION: Notice of site for the hearings associated with the 1995 Annual Review.

SUMMARY: This notice announces that the hearings for the 1995 Annual Review under the Generalized System of Preferences will be held November 13 and 14, 1996 at the International Trade Commission, Main Hearing Room, 500 E Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20436. The hearings will begin at 10 am on November 13th.

For further information contact the GSP Information Center (202) 395-6971.

Frederick L. Montgomery,
Chairman, Trade Policy Staff Committee.

[FR Doc. 96-27410 Filed 10-24-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3190-01-M

[Docket Number 301-103]

Termination of Section 302 Investigation Regarding Portugal's Implementation of the Patent Protection Provisions of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights

AGENCY: Office of the United States Trade Representative.