

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Loretta A. Carey, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (HFS-158), Food and Drug Administration, 200 C St. SW., Washington, DC 20204, 202-205-5099.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In the **Federal Register** of March 4, 1997 (62 FR 9826), FDA published a proposed rule to revise its human and animal food labeling regulations that pertain to declarations of net quantity of contents on food packages. That proposal set out procedures for determining whether net quantity of contents declarations accurately reflect the amount of product in food packages. Interested persons were given until June 2, 1997, to comment on the proposed rule.

FDA has received letters from trade associations that represent major segments of both the food and feed industries requesting the agency to grant a 90-day extension of the comment period on its proposed rule for determining compliance for net quantity of contents declarations. The requests argued that the proposed regulation is unusually technical in nature and includes procedures that will affect both food and feed manufacturers and consumers. The requests contend that additional time is needed for interested persons to evaluate fully the impact of the proposed regulation on various products and to assess and develop potential alternatives to the proposed procedures. The agency acknowledges that the proposed rule is quite technical in nature and, after careful consideration, has decided to grant an extension of the comment period until September 2, 1997.

Interested persons may, on or before September 2, 1997, submit to the Dockets Management Branch (address above) written comments regarding this proposed rule. Two copies of any comments are to be submitted, except that individuals may submit one copy. Comments are to be identified with the docket number found in brackets in the heading of this document. Received comments may be seen in the office above between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Dated: May 13, 1997.

William K. Hubbard,

Associate Commissioner for Policy Coordination.

[FR Doc. 97-14142 Filed 5-29-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4160-01-F

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement****30 CFR Parts 740, 745, 761, and 772**

RIN 1029-AB42 and 1029-AB82

Valid Existing Rights and Prohibitions of Section 522(e); Extension of Public Comment Period

AGENCY: Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, Interior.
ACTION: Extension of comment period.

SUMMARY: On January 31, 1997, (62 FR 4836-72), the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM) of the U.S. Department of the Interior published proposed rules which would implement and interpret section 522(e) of Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 (SMCRA). On that date, OSM also made available for public comment a draft economic analysis (DEA) analyzing the potential impacts of the proposed rules. As a result of requests received, OSM is extending the comment period for the proposed rules and the DEA.

DATES: *Electronic or written comments:* OSM will accept electronic or written comments on the proposed rules and DEA until 5:00 p.m. Eastern time on August 1, 1997.

ADDRESSES: *Electronic or written comments:* Submit electronic comments to osmrules@osmre.gov. Mail written comments to the Administrative Record, Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, 1951 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20240 or hand-deliver to Room 117 at the above address.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Andy DeVito, Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1951 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20240; Telephone (202) 208-2701; E-Mail: adevito@osmre.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On January 31, 1997 (62 FR 4836-72) OSM published two proposed rules dealing with the interpretation and implementation of section 522(e) of SMCRA. The first rule, RIN 1029-AB42, would amend OSM's regulations to redefine the circumstances under which a person has valid existing rights to conduct surface coal mining operations in areas where such operations are otherwise prohibited by section 522(e) of SMCRA. The second rule, RIN 1029-AB82, is a proposed interpretative rulemaking to address the question of

whether subsidence due to underground mining is a surface coal mining operation and thus prohibited in areas enumerated in section 522(e) of SMCRA. On January 31, 1997 (62 FR 4759), OSM also made available for public comment a DEIS analyzing the impact of the two proposed rules and the alternatives under consideration.

The comment period was scheduled to close on June 2, 1997. In order to accommodate several requests for an extension of the public comment period, OSM is extending the comment period until 5 p.m. Eastern time on August 1, 1997.

Under separate **Federal Register** Notice, the public comment period for the DEIS is also being extended until 5 p.m. Eastern time on August 1, 1997.

Dated: May 27, 1997.

Mary Josie Blanchard,

Assistant Director, Program Support.

[FR Doc. 97-14162 Filed 5-29-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-05-M

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY**Fiscal Service****31 CFR Part 240**

RIN 1510-AA45

Indorsement and Payment of Checks Drawn on the United States Treasury

AGENCY: Financial Management Service, Fiscal Service, Treasury.

ACTION: Proposed Rule.

SUMMARY: This reissues an earlier proposed revision of 31 CFR part 240, which governs the indorsement and payment of checks drawn on the United States Treasury. The purpose of this reissuance is to announce that it is Treasury's intention to supersede existing Federal common law regarding the apportionment of risk between Treasury and presenting banks with respect to certain materially defective Treasury checks, including counterfeits. Procedural changes are intended both to fix the time by which Treasury can decline payment on Treasury checks and to provide financial institutions with a date certain for final payment. These rules also provide greater clarity by defining previously undefined terms and by ensuring symmetry with current Treasury regulations governing Federal payments utilizing the Automated Clearing House method. In addition, these rules provide that Treasury may instruct Federal Reserve Banks to intercept and return, unpaid, benefit payment checks issued to deceased

payees. These proposed revisions are issued in response to concerns raised by financial institutions, Federal agencies, and other affected parties.

DATES: Comments must be submitted on or before July 29, 1997.

ADDRESSES: All comments concerning these proposed regulations should be addressed to Ronald Brooks, Senior Program Analyst, Financial Processing Division, Financial Management Service, Prince Georges Center II Building, 3700 East-West Highway, Room 725-D, Hyattsville, Maryland 20782. Comments may be faxed to (202) 874-7534.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ronald Brooks, (202) 874-7620 (Senior Program Analyst, Financial Processing Division); Paul M. Curran, (202) 874-6680 (Principal Attorney).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Limitations on Payment

The current regulation provides that Treasury shall have the right to conduct first examination of Treasury checks presented for payment, and to refuse payment of any checks within a reasonable time. The current regulation also provides that such checks shall be deemed paid only upon Treasury's completion of first examination. The proposed rule clarifies this in two ways.

First, it defines first examination, and defines material defects or alterations as including counterfeit checks. These definitions are consistent with Treasury's longstanding interpretation of these terms.

Second, it fixes and narrows the time by which Treasury must complete first examination, and provides that if Treasury fails to do so within 150 days, the check will be deemed paid. This proposed change is intended to accommodate financial institutions which seek not only a more compressed time frame for first examination but also a date certain for final payment of Treasury checks.

While Treasury will, in most cases, complete first examination well within 30 days of presentment of a Treasury check to a Federal Reserve Bank, the 150 day maximum period affords Treasury sufficient time to complete first examination in certain problem cases. For example, up to 150 days may be required in instances where there are delays in Treasury's obtaining from check certifying or authorizing agencies the payment issue tapes necessary to complete first examination.

Recovery by Bank From Depositors

The proposed rule clarifies that the regulations contained in this Part

neither authorize nor direct any financial institution to debit the account of any depositor. It further clarifies that any financial institution's right of recovery against depositors is derived from both the depository contracts with its customers and any self-help remedies authorized by State law governing the relationship between financial institutions and their customers. This provision mirrors the regulations codified in 31 CFR part 210, which pertains to "Federal Payments Through Financial Institutions By the Automated Clearing House Method."

Deceased Payee Check Intercepts

Currently, where a benefit payment check has been issued and negotiated after a payee's death, Treasury generally recovers the funds from financial institutions through the reclamation process. Financial institutions have expressed dissatisfaction with these procedures because Treasury reclamation actions only occur after final payment and because in many instances the depositors have closed their accounts or withdrawn most or all of the funds. These financial institutions seek a process by which Treasury can intercept such checks upon presentment and return such checks unpaid before the financial institutions are required under Federal Reserve Regulation CC (12 CFR part 229) to make funds permanently available to their depositors. This proposed rule responds to those concerns, and should result in a lower volume of payments to nonentitled payees.

Specifically, it clarifies that benefit payment checks issued after a payee's death are not payable. It also sets forth procedures by which Treasury will instruct the Federal Reserve to intercept such checks upon presentment and return unpaid those checks which are successfully intercepted to the depository banks.

Forged Drawer's Signature

On September 11, 1995, the United States Court of Federal Claims filed an opinion in the case of *ABN AMRO Bank, N.V. v. United States*, 34 Fed.Cl. 126 (1995), which held that, under Federal common law, Treasury generally cannot recover on a Treasury check bearing the forged signature of a drawer (i.e., disbursing officer). The Court further held that this result is not changed when a check also bears a forged indorsement on the back. In so ruling, the Court relied on the precedent of *United States v. Chase National Bank*, 252 U.S. 485 (1920), which, in turn, had relied on the English case of *Price v. Neal*, 97 Eng.Rep. 871, 3 Burr. 1354

(1762). The Court went on to hold that Treasury had failed to act in a manner which made evident an intent to modify by regulation the holdings of these cases.

This ruling is inconsistent with Treasury's longstanding policy and interpretation of its regulations, which has been that the Government does not bear the loss on checks bearing forged drawers' signatures, including counterfeits. In order to clarify this matter, we are reissuing the proposed rule. Treasury is cognizant of relevant United States Supreme Court precedent interpreting the common law in this area and, by this regulation, will remove any ambiguity regarding Treasury having supplanted that common law. In so acting, Treasury relies on the Secretary's general rulemaking authority, 31 U.S.C. 321, as well as the specific statutory authority of the Secretary to prescribe regulations on the payment of drafts, found at 31 U.S.C. 3328(e).

Rulemaking Analysis

It has been determined that this regulation is not a significant regulatory action as defined in E.O. 12866. Therefore, a Regulatory Assessment is not required.

It is hereby certified pursuant to the Regulatory Flexibility Act that this revision will not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small business entities. Accordingly, a Regulatory Flexibility Act analysis is not required.

These regulations impose time frames within which first examination of Treasury checks must be accomplished, and establish consequences for the failure of Treasury to honor those time frames. Consequently, these regulations provide financial institutions with greater certainty regarding the entire payment process, and place higher standards of performance on Treasury in its processing of checks.

The other principal provision of these regulations will reduce the likelihood that final payment on Treasury checks will be made to nonentitled persons. Treasury's efficiency and its ability to serve the needs of legitimate payees of benefit programs will thereby be enhanced.

Although these regulations assign to banks the risk of loss on materially defective Treasury checks, this traditionally has been Treasury's practice and policy. Even if these regulations were to be viewed as representing a change in practice or policy, however, the impact on the economy, or any sector thereof, or on small business entities, would be minor.

Notice and Comment

Public comment is solicited on all aspects of this proposed regulation. Comments previously received on the substance of this proposed regulation will be considered together with comments submitted in response to this notice.

Therefore, while commenters are free to submit additional comments at this time, they need not re-submit earlier comments. Treasury does not intend to hold hearings.

List of Subjects in 31 CFR Part 240

Banks, Banking, Checks, Counterfeit checks, Federal Reserve system, Forgery, Guarantees.

For the reasons set out in the preamble, 31 CFR part 240 is proposed to be amended as follows.

PART 240—INDORSEMENT AND PAYMENT OF CHECKS DRAWN ON THE UNITED STATES TREASURY

1. The authority citation for part 240 is revised to read as follows:

Authority: 5 U.S.C. 301; 12 U.S.C. 391; 31 U.S.C. 321; 31 U.S.C. 3327; 31 U.S.C. 3328; 31 U.S.C. 3331; 31 U.S.C. 3334; 31 U.S.C. 3343; 31 U.S.C. 3711; 31 U.S.C. 3712; 31 U.S.C. 3716; 31 U.S.C. 3717; 318 U.S. 363 (1943).

2. Section 240.1 is revised to read as follows:

§ 240.1 Scope of regulations.

(a) The regulations in this part prescribe the requirements for indorsement and the conditions for payment of checks drawn on the United States Treasury. These regulations also establish procedures for collection of amounts due the United States Treasury because of payments on checks bearing forged or unauthorized indorsements or other material defects or alterations.

(b) Standards contained in this regulation supercede existing Federal common law holding that Treasury generally cannot recover on checks bearing forged disbursing officers' (i.e., drawers') signatures. Under the provisions of this regulation, the risk of loss on checks bearing forged disbursing officers' signatures, including counterfeits, is placed on presenting banks.

3. Section 240.2 is revised to read as follows:

§ 240.2 Definitions.

(a) *Agency* means any department, instrumentality, office, commission, board, service, or other establishment of the United States authorized to issue Treasury checks or for which checks drawn on the Treasury of the United States are issued.

(b) *Bank* means any financial institution, including but not limited to, any savings bank, national bank, state bank, and credit union created under Federal or state law.

(c) *Benefit payment* includes but is not limited to a payment of money for any Federal Government entitlement program or annuity.

(d) *Certifying agency* means an agency authorizing the issuance of a Treasury payment by a Treasury disbursing officer or a non-Treasury disbursing officer in accordance with 31 U.S.C. 3325.

(e) *Check* or *checks* means a check or checks drawn on the United States Treasury.

(f) *Check payment* means the amount paid to a presenting bank by a Federal Reserve Bank.

(g) *Commissioner* means the Commissioner of the Financial Management Service, Department of the Treasury.

(h) *Days* means calendar days.

(i) *Decline payment* means the process whereby Treasury refuses to make final payment on a check by instructing the Federal Reserve Bank to reverse its provisional credit to a presenting bank.

(j) *Federal Reserve Bank* means a Federal Reserve Bank and its branches.

(k) *Financial institution* means any bank, including but not limited to, any savings bank, national bank, state bank and credit union created under Federal or state law.

(l) *First examination* means the process of check reconciliation which involves comparing disbursing officer issue information on checks with Federal Reserve Bank payment information. Where the issue information is at odds with the payment information, first examination will include retrieval and inspection of the check, or the best available image thereof.

(m) *Item* means a reference, as in a monthly interest billing statement or similar document, to a check.

(n) *Material defect or alteration* means

- (1) The counterfeiting of a check; or
- (2) Any physical change on a check,

including, but not limited to, the amount, date, payee name, or other identifying information printed on either the front or the back of the check; or

(3) Any forged or unauthorized indorsement appearing on the back of the check.

(o) *Monthly interest billing statement* means a statement prepared by Treasury and sent to a bank which includes the following information regarding each outstanding demand for refund:

- (1) The reclamation date;
- (2) The reclamation number;

(3) Check identifying information; and
(4) The balance due, including interest.

(p) *Person* or *persons* means an individual or individuals, or an institution or institutions, including all forms of financial institutions.

(q) *Presenting bank* means:

(1) A financial institution which, either directly or through a correspondent banking relationship, presents checks to and receives provisional credit from a Federal Reserve Bank; or

(2) A depository which is authorized to charge checks directly to the Treasury General Account and present them to Treasury for payment through a designated Federal Reserve Bank.

(r) *Protest* means a bank's written statement and any supporting documentation tendered for the purpose of establishing that the bank is not liable for refund of the reclamation balance.

(s) *Reclamation* means a demand by Treasury for refund of the amount of a check payment.

(t) *Reclamation date* means the date on which a demand for refund was prepared. Normally, demands are sent to banks within 2 working days of the reclamation date.

(u) *Treasury* means the United States Department of the Treasury.

(v) *U.S. securities* means securities of the United States and securities of Federal agencies and wholly or partially Government-owned corporations for which Treasury acts as the transfer agent.

(w) *Unauthorized indorsement* means:

(1) An indorsement made by a person other than the payee or payees, except as authorized by and in accordance with § 240.5 and § 240.11 through § 240.15;

(2) An indorsement by a financial institution under circumstances in which the financial institution breaches the guaranty of indorsement required of it by § 209.9(a) of this title;

(3) A missing indorsement where the depository bank had no authority to supply the indorsement.

4. Section 240.3 is amended by revising paragraphs (c), (d) and (e) to read as follows:

§ 240.3 Limitations on payment.

* * * * *

(c)(1) Treasury shall have the right as drawee to examine checks presented for payment and reconcile or direct the Federal Reserve Bank to refuse payment of any checks.

(2) Receipt of credit by a financial institution from a Federal Reserve Bank shall be provisional until Treasury

completes first examination of the check.

(3) When first examination by Treasury establishes that a check has a material defect or alteration, Treasury will decline payment on the check.

(d) Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (c) of this section, when issue information is not available within 150 days after the check is presented to the Federal Reserve Bank for payment, or when first examination is otherwise not completed within such time frame, Treasury will be deemed to have made final payment on the check.

(e) Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (d) of this section, if Treasury is on notice of a question of law or fact about whether a check is properly payable upon presentment for payment, and Treasury refers such question to the Comptroller General under 31 U.S.C. 3328(a)(2), the Commissioner may defer final payment on the check until the Comptroller General settles the question.

* * * * *

5. Section 240.4 is amended by removing paragraph (a) introductory text; by removing paragraph (b); by redesignating paragraphs (a)(1), (a)(2) and (a)(3) as paragraphs (a), (b) and (c); and by revising newly redesignated paragraphs (a) and (c) to read as follows:

§ 240.4 Cancellation and distribution of proceeds of checks.

(a) Any check issued on or after October 1, 1989 that has not been paid and remains outstanding for more than 12 months will be cancelled by the Commissioner.

* * * * *

(c) On a monthly basis, the Commissioner will provide to each agency that authorizes the issuance of Treasury checks a list of those checks issued for such agency which were cancelled during the preceding month pursuant to paragraph (a) of this section.

6. Section 240.6(a) is revised to read as follows:

§ 240.6 Reclamation of amounts of paid checks.

(a) If Treasury determines:

(1) That a check has been paid over a forged or unauthorized indorsement; or

(2) That a check containing a material defect or alteration is deemed paid under § 240.3, the presenting bank or any other indorser shall be liable to the Treasury for the full amount of the check payment. The Commissioner may reclaim the amount of the check payment from the presenting bank, or from any other indorser that breached its guaranty of indorsement prior to:

(i) The end of the 1-year period beginning on the date of provisional payment; or

(ii) The expiration of the 180-day period beginning on the close of the period described in paragraph (a)(2)(i) of this section if a timely claim under 31 U.S.C. 3702 is presented to the certifying agency.

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7. Section 240.9 is amended by revising paragraphs (a)(1), (a)(3), introductory text, (a)(3)(ii), and (a)(3)(iv) to read as follows:

§ 240.9 Processing of checks.

(a) *Federal Reserve Banks.* (1) Federal Reserve Banks shall cash checks for Government disbursing officers when such checks are drawn by the disbursing officers to their own order. Payment of such checks shall not be refused except for material defect or alteration of the check.

* * * * *

(3) As a depository of public funds, each Federal Reserve Bank shall:

* * * * *

(ii) Give immediate provisional credit therefor in accordance with their current Time Schedules and charge the amount of the checks cashed or otherwise received to the account of the Treasury, subject to first examination and payment by Treasury.

* * * * *

(iv) Release the original checks to a designated Federal Records Center upon notification from Treasury. Treasury shall return to the forwarding Federal Reserve Bank a copy of any check the payment of which is declined upon the completion of first examination, together with notice of the declination. Federal Reserve Banks shall give immediate credit therefor in Treasury's account, thereby reversing the previous charge to the account for such check. Treasury authorizes each Federal Reserve Bank to release a copy of the check to the indorser when payment is declined.

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8. Section 240.13 is amended by adding paragraph (c) to read as follows:

§ 240.13 Checks issued to deceased payees.

* * * * *

(c) *Deceased payee check intercepts.*

(1) A benefit payment check, issued after a payee's death, is not payable. When a certifying agency learns that a payee has died, the certifying agency shall give immediate notice to Treasury. Upon receipt of such notice, Treasury will instruct the Federal Reserve Bank to refuse payment on the check upon

presentment. The Federal Reserve Bank will make every appropriate effort to intercept the check. Where a check is successfully intercepted, the Federal Reserve bank will refuse payment, and return the check unpaid to the bank with an annotation that the payee is deceased. Where a financial institution learns that a date of death triggering action under this section is erroneous, the appropriate certifying agency which authorized the issuance of the check should be contacted.

(2) Nothing in this section shall limit the right of Treasury to institute reclamation proceedings under the provisions of § 240.6 with respect to a deceased payee check paid over a forged or unauthorized indorsement.

9. Section 240.16 is added to read as follows:

§ 240.16 Lack of authority to shift liability.

(a) This part neither authorizes nor directs a bank to debit the account of any party or to deposit any funds from any account in a suspense account or escrow account or the equivalent. However, nothing in this part shall be construed to affect a bank's contract with its depositor(s) under authority of State law.

(b) A bank's liability under this part is not affected by any action taken by it to recover from any party the amount of the bank's liability to the Treasury.

9. Section 240.17 is added to read as follows:

§ 240.17 Implementing instructions.

Procedural instructions implementing these regulations will be issued by the Commissioner of the Financial Management Service in volume I, part 4 and volume II, part 4 of the Treasury Financial Manual.

Russell D. Morris,

Commissioner.

[FR Doc. 97-14174 Filed 5-29-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4810-35-U

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

40 CFR Part 52

[TX-73-1-7316b, FRL-5830-8]

Approval and Promulgation of Air Quality Plans, Texas; Alternate Reasonably Available Control Technology Demonstration for Bell Helicopter Textron, Incorporated; Bell Plant 1 Facility

AGENCY: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

ACTION: Proposed rulemaking.