

(f) *You may request that your employer withhold more.* If you request in writing that your employer withhold more than the amount determined under paragraphs (d) or (e) of this section, we will order your employer to withhold the amount that you request.

§ 422.440 What are your employer's responsibilities under an administrative wage garnishment order?

(a) *When withholding must begin.* Your employer must withhold the appropriate amount from your disposable pay on each payday beginning on the first payday after receiving the garnishment order issued under this section. If the first payday is within 10 days after your employer receives the order, then your employer must begin withholding on the first or second payday after your employer receives the order. Withholding must continue until we notify your employer to stop withholding.

(b) *Payment of amounts withheld.* Your employer must promptly pay to us all amounts withheld under this section.

(c) *Other assignments or allotments of pay.* Your employer cannot honor an assignment or allotment of your pay to the extent that it would interfere with or prevent withholding under this section, unless the assignment or allotment is made under a family support judgement or order.

(d) *Effect of withholding on employer pay and disbursement cycles.* Your employer will not be required to vary its normal pay and disbursement cycles in order to comply with the garnishment order.

(e) *When withholding ends.* When we have fully recovered the amounts you owe, including interest, penalties, and administrative costs that we charge you as allowed by law, we will tell your employer to stop withholding from your disposable pay. As an added precaution, we will review our debtors' accounts at least annually to ensure that withholding has been terminated for accounts paid in full.

(f) *Certain actions by an employer against you are prohibited.* Federal law prohibits an employer from using a garnishment order issued under this section as the basis for discharging you from employment, refusing to employ you, or taking disciplinary action against you. If your employer violates this prohibition, you may file a civil action against your employer in a Federal or State court of competent jurisdiction.

§ 422.445 May we bring a civil action against your employer for failure to comply with our administrative wage garnishment order?

(a) We may bring a civil action against your employer for any amount that the employer fails to withhold from your disposable pay in accordance with § 422.435(d), (e) and (f). Your employer may also be liable for attorney fees, costs of the lawsuit and (in the court's discretion) punitive damages.

(b) We will not file a civil action against your employer before we terminate collection action against you, unless earlier filing is necessary to avoid expiration of any applicable statute of limitations period. For purposes of this section, "terminate collection action" means that we have terminated collection action in accordance with the Federal Claims Collection Standards (31 CFR 903.3) or other applicable standards. In any event, we will consider that collection action has been terminated if we have not received any payments to satisfy the debt for a period of one year.

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DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

28 CFR Part 15

[CIV 102F; AG Order No. 2697-2003]

RIN 1105-AA62

Certification and Decertification in Connection With Certain Suits Based Upon Acts or Omissions of Federal Employees and Other Persons

AGENCY: Department of Justice.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: In cases where employees of the Federal government are sued for money damages based on alleged torts, if the Attorney General certifies that the employees (and certain non-employees) were acting within the scope of their employment at the time, the suit would be deemed an action against the United States under the Federal Tort Claims Act. This final rule conforms Department regulations to the provisions of the Federal Employees Liability Reform and Tort Compensation Act which expanded the tort protections for Federal employees (and certain non-employees) by finalizing a proposed rule the Department published on this subject on October 22, 2002.

DATES: This final rule is effective January 22, 2004.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Phyllis J. Pyles, Director, Torts Branch,

Civil Division, U.S. Department of Justice, P.O. Box 888, Benjamin Franklin Station, Washington, DC 20044.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Department published a proposed rule on this subject on October 22, 2002, at 67 FR 64844. No comments were received before the comment period closed on December 23, 2002, and, accordingly, the Department is finalizing the proposed rule without change.

Background

In 1961 Congress passed the Federal Drivers Act, 75 Stat. 539, which immunized Federal employees from liability for money damages based on torts involving the operation of motor vehicles within the scope of their employment. In the event that a Federal employee was sued in such a case, the statute authorized the Attorney General to issue a certification that the employee was acting within the scope of his or her employment at the time of the incident out of which the suit arose, and the suit thereafter would be deemed a tort action against the United States pursuant to the Federal Tort Claims Act, 28 U.S.C. 1346(b), 2671-2680.

In ensuing years, a number of similar certification statutes were enacted to protect medical and legal personnel employed by certain Federal agencies from tort liability for professional malpractice arising within the scope of their employment. *E.g.*, 10 U.S.C. 1054 (Department of Defense legal personnel); 10 U.S.C. 1089 (Department of Defense medical personnel); 22 U.S.C. 2509(j) (Peace Corps medical personnel); 22 U.S.C. 2702 (Department of State medical personnel); 38 U.S.C. 7316 (Department of Veterans Affairs medical personnel); 42 U.S.C. 233 (Public Health Service medical personnel); 42 U.S.C. 2458a (National Aeronautics and Space Administration medical personnel).

Most recently, the Federal Employees Liability Reform and Tort Compensation Act, 28 U.S.C. 2679(b)-(e), became law. This certification statute, which replaced the less comprehensive Federal Drivers Act, extended immunity from liability for money damages to Federal employees for all common law torts committed within the scope of their employment.

A number of certification statutes also have been enacted to protect certain non-employees from tort liability arising out of certain Federal programs. As part of the National Swine Flu Immunization Program of 1976, 90 Stat. 1113, Congress authorized the Attorney General to issue certifications in suits brought against

certain agencies, organizations, and individuals which participated in the manufacture, distribution, and administration of the swine flu vaccine. Similar authority has been conferred on the Attorney General with respect to certain suits against fiduciaries of the Federal Retirement Thrift Savings Fund (5 U.S.C. 8477(e)(4)); atomic weapon testing contractors (42 U.S.C. 2212); and certain individuals enrolled as volunteers in National Volunteer Programs (42 U.S.C. 5055(f)).

Finally, several statutes, without expressly providing for certification, confer Federal employee status on certain persons who would not otherwise be encompassed within the Federal Tort Claims Act's definition of an "employee of the United States" as that term is defined by 28 U.S.C. 2671. *E.g.*, 5 U.S.C. 3102 (persons employed to assist handicapped federal employees in performing duties); 5 U.S.C. 3111 (unpaid student volunteers); 7 U.S.C. 2272 (volunteers to Department of Agriculture); 10 U.S.C. 1588 (volunteers to Armed Services); 16 U.S.C. 18i (volunteers to National Park Service); 16 U.S.C. 558c (volunteers to Forest Service); 22 U.S.C. 2504 (Peace Corps volunteers); 29 U.S.C. 1706 (Job Corps enrollees); 33 U.S.C. 569c (volunteers to Army Corps of Engineers); 42 U.S.C. 3788 (volunteers to Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance, National Institute of Justice Assistance, and Bureau of Justice Statistics).

Part 15 has not been revised since the enactment of the Federal Employees Liability Reform and Tort Compensation Act. The regulations were initially promulgated after passage of the Federal Drivers Act, 26 FR 11420 (1961), and revised as additional certification statutes were enacted. *See* 40 FR 4910 (1975); 42 FR 15409 (1977); 44 FR 9379 (1979); 49 FR 44995 (1984). As last revised, Part 15 comprises three sections (15.1, 15.2, and 15.3) and an appendix. Each section in turn is subdivided into three subsections which govern suits subject to (1) the Federal Drivers Act and the malpractice certification statutes; (2) the swine flu statute; and (3) the atomic weapons testing statute.

This rule revises Part 15 to conform it to the provisions of the Federal Employees Liability Reform and Tort Compensation Act, and to delete references to specific certification statutes. Section 15.1 is new and sets forth definitions of the terms "appropriate Federal agency," "Federal employee," and "covered person." Sections 15.2, 15.3, and 15.4 cover the same subjects which were covered by the prior versions of sections 15.1, 15.2, and 15.3, respectively, except that rather

than the former tripartite subdivision, each section is subdivided into two paragraphs, one of which governs suits against Federal employees, and the other which governs suits against covered persons. The appendix is removed.

Executive Order 12866

This rule falls within a category of actions that the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has determined not to constitute "significant regulatory actions" under section 3(f) of Executive Order 12866 and, accordingly, it was not reviewed by OMB.

Executive Order 13132

This regulation will not have substantial direct effects on the States, on the relationship between the national government and the States, or on the distribution of power and responsibilities among the various levels of government. Therefore, in accordance with Executive Order 13132, it is determined that this rule does not have sufficient federalism implications to warrant the preparation of a Federalism Assessment.

Regulatory Flexibility Act

The Attorney General, in accordance with the Regulatory Flexibility Act (5 U.S.C. 605(b)), has reviewed this regulation and by approving it certifies that this regulation will not have a significant economic impact upon a substantial number of small entities for the following reasons: This rule pertains to Federal employees and certain non-employees against whom civil actions are filed under circumstances in which the remedy against the United States under the Federal Tort Claims Act has been made exclusive of the remedy against such Federal employees and non-employees. The regulation requires Federal employees in those circumstances promptly to deliver the process and pleadings in such actions to their employing Federal agency, and the agency to send a report concerning the matter to the appropriate United States Attorney and the responsible Branch Director of the Torts Branch, Civil Division, Department of Justice. The regulation further requires covered non-employees in those circumstances promptly to deliver the process and pleadings in such actions to the appropriate Federal agency, and the agency to send a report concerning the matter to the appropriate United States Attorney and the responsible Branch Director of the Torts Branch, Civil Division, Department of Justice. The rule's economic impact is minimal.

Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995

This rule will not result in the expenditure by State, local and tribal governments, in the aggregate, or by the private sector, of \$100,000,000 or more in any one year, and it will not significantly or uniquely affect small governments. Therefore, no actions were deemed necessary under the provisions of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995.

Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996

This rule is not a major rule as defined by section 251 of the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996, 5 U.S.C. 804. This rule will not result in an annual effect on the economy of \$100,000,000 or more; a major increase in costs or prices; or significant adverse effects on competition, employment, investment, productivity, innovation, or on the ability of the United States-based companies to compete with foreign-based companies in domestic and export markets.

List of Subjects in 28 CFR Part 15

Authority delegations (Government agencies), Tort claims.

■ For the reasons stated in the preamble, the Department of Justice revises 28 CFR part 15 to read as follows:

PART 15—CERTIFICATION AND DECERTIFICATION IN CONNECTION WITH CERTAIN SUITS BASED UPON ACTS OR OMISSIONS OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES AND OTHER PERSONS

Sec.

- 15.1 General provisions.
- 15.2 Expeditious delivery of process and pleadings.
- 15.3 Agency report.
- 15.4 Removal and defense of suits.

Authority: 5 U.S.C. 301, 8477(e)(4); 10 U.S.C. 1054, 1089; 22 U.S.C. 2702; 28 U.S.C. 509, 510, and 2679; 38 U.S.C. 7316; 42 U.S.C. 233, 2212, 2458a, and 5055(f); and the National Swine Flu Immunization Program of 1976, 90 Stat. 1113 (1976).

§ 15.1 General provisions.

(a) This part contains the regulations of the Department of Justice governing the application for and the issuance of statutory certifications and decertifications in connection with certain suits based upon the acts or omissions of Federal employees and certain other persons as to whom the remedy provided by the Federal Tort Claims Act, 28 U.S.C. 1346(b) and 2672, is made exclusive of any other civil action or proceeding for money damages by reason of the same subject matter

against such Federal employees and other persons.

(b) As used in this part:

(1) *Appropriate Federal agency* means the Federal agency most closely associated with the program out of which the claim or suit arose. When it cannot be ascertained which Federal agency is the most closely associated with the program out of which the claim or suit arose, the responsible Director of the Torts Branch, Civil Division, Department of Justice, shall be consulted and will thereafter designate the appropriate Federal agency.

(2) *Federal employee* means "employee of the United States" as that term is defined by 28 U.S.C. 2671.

(3) *Covered person* means any person other than a Federal employee or the estate of a Federal employee as to whom Congress has provided by statute that the remedy provided by 28 U.S.C. 1346(b) and 2672 is made exclusive of any other civil action or proceeding for money damages by reason of the same subject matter against such person.

§ 15.2 Expeditionary delivery of process and pleadings.

(a) Any Federal employee against whom a civil action or proceeding is brought for money damages for loss or damage to property, or personal injury or death, on account of any act or omission in the scope of the employee's office or employment with the Federal Government, shall promptly deliver all process and pleadings served on the employee, or an attested true copy thereof, to the employee's immediate superior or to whomever is designated by the head of the employee's department or agency to receive such papers. In addition, if prior to the employee's receipt of such process or pleadings, the employee receives information regarding the commencement of such a civil action or proceeding, he shall immediately so advise his superior or the designee. If the action is brought against the employee's estate this procedure shall apply to the employee's personal representative. The superior or designee shall provide the United States Attorney for the district embracing the place where the action or proceeding is brought and the responsible Branch Director of the Torts Branch, Civil Division, Department of Justice, information concerning the commencement of such action or proceeding, and copies of all process and pleadings.

(b) Any covered person against whom a civil action or proceeding is brought for money damages for loss or damage to property, or personal injury or death,

on account of any act or omission, under circumstances in which Congress has provided by statute that the remedy provided by the Federal Tort Claims Act is made the exclusive remedy, shall promptly deliver to the appropriate Federal agency all process and pleadings served on the covered person, or an attested true copy thereof. In addition, if prior to the covered person's receipt of such process or pleadings, the covered person receives information regarding the commencement of such a civil action or proceeding, he shall immediately so advise the appropriate Federal agency. The appropriate Federal agency shall provide to the United States Attorney for the district embracing the place where the action or proceeding is brought, and the responsible Branch Director of the Torts Branch, Civil Division, Department of Justice, information concerning the commencement of such action or proceeding, and copies of all process and pleadings.

§ 15.3 Agency report.

(a) The Federal employee's employing Federal agency shall submit a report to the United States Attorney for the district embracing the place where the civil action or proceeding is brought fully addressing whether the employee was acting within the scope of his office or employment with the Federal Government at the time of the incident out of which the suit arose, and a copy of the report shall be sent by the employing Federal agency to the responsible Branch Director of the Torts Branch, Civil Division, Department of Justice.

(b) The appropriate Federal agency shall submit a report to the United States Attorney for the district embracing the place where the civil action or proceeding is brought fully addressing whether the person was acting as a covered person at the time of the incident out of which the suit arose, and a copy of the report shall be sent by the appropriate Federal agency to the responsible Branch Director of the Torts Branch, Civil Division, Department of Justice.

(c) A report under this section shall be submitted at the earliest possible date, or within such time as shall be fixed upon request by the United States Attorney or the responsible Branch Director of the Torts Branch.

§ 15.4 Removal and defense of suits.

(a) The United States Attorney for the district where the civil action or proceeding is brought, or any Director of the Torts Branch, Civil Division, Department of Justice, is authorized to

make the statutory certification that the Federal employee was acting within the scope of his office or employment with the Federal Government at the time of the incident out of which the suit arose.

(b) The United States Attorney for the district where the civil action or proceeding is brought, or any Director of the Torts Branch, Civil Division, Department of Justice, is authorized to make the statutory certification that the covered person was acting at the time of the incident out of which the suit arose under circumstances in which Congress has provided by statute that the remedy provided by the Federal Tort Claims Act is made the exclusive remedy.

(c) A certification under this section may be withdrawn if a further evaluation of the relevant facts or the consideration of new or additional evidence calls for such action. The making, withholding, or withdrawing of certifications, and the removal and defense of, or refusal to remove or defend, such civil actions or proceedings shall be subject to the instructions and supervision of the Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Civil Division or his or her designee.

Dated: December 16, 2003.

John Ashcroft,
Attorney General.

[FR Doc. 03-31489 Filed 12-22-03; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Coast Guard

33 CFR PART 27

[USCG-2003-15486]

RIN 1625-AA73

Civil Monetary Penalties—Adjustments for Inflation

AGENCY: Coast Guard, DHS.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: The Coast Guard is adjusting fines and other civil monetary penalties to reflect the impact of inflation. These adjustments are made in accordance with the Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act of 1990, as amended by the Debt Collection Improvement Act of 1996.

DATES: This final rule is effective January 22, 2004.

ADDRESSES: Material received from the public, as well as documents mentioned in this preamble as being available in the docket, are part of docket USCG-2003-15486 and are available for