

Rules and Regulations

Federal Register

Vol. 83, No. 11

Wednesday, January 17, 2018

This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains regulatory documents having general applicability and legal effect, most of which are keyed to and codified in the Code of Federal Regulations, which is published under 50 titles pursuant to 44 U.S.C. 1510.

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OFFICE OF GOVERNMENT ETHICS

5 CFR Parts 2634 and 2636

RIN 3209-AA38

Civil Monetary Penalties Inflation Adjustments for Ethics in Government Act Violations

AGENCY: Office of Government Ethics.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act Improvements Act of 2015, the U.S. Office of Government Ethics (OGE) is issuing this final rule to make the 2018 annual adjustments to the Ethics in Government Act civil monetary penalties.

DATES: *Effective date:* This final rule is effective January 17, 2018. *Applicability date:* This final rule is applicable January 15, 2018.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kimberly L. Sikora Panza, Associate Counsel, General Counsel and Legal Policy Division, Office of Government Ethics, Telephone: 202-482-9300; TTY: 800-877-8339; FAX: 202-482-9237.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Background

In November 2015, Congress passed the Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act Improvements Act of 2015 (Sec. 701 of Pub. L. 114-74) (the 2015 Act), which further amended the Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act of 1990 (Pub. L. 101-410). The 2015 Act required Federal agencies to make inflationary adjustments to the civil monetary penalties (CMPs) within their jurisdiction with an initial “catch-up” adjustment through an interim final rule effective no later than August 1, 2016, and further mandates that Federal agencies make subsequent annual inflationary adjustments of their CMPs, to be effective no later than January 15 of each year.

The Ethics in Government Act of 1978 as amended, 5 U.S.C. appendix (the Ethics Act) provides for five CMPs.¹ Specifically, the Ethics Act provides for penalties that can be assessed by an appropriate United States district court, based upon a civil action brought by the Department of Justice, for the following five types of violations:

(1) Knowing and willful failure to file, report required information on, or falsification of a public financial disclosure report, 5 U.S.C. appendix 104(a), 5 CFR 2634.701(b);

(2) knowing and willful breach of a qualified trust by trustees and interested parties, 5 U.S.C. appendix 102(f)(6)(C)(i), 5 CFR 2634.702(a);

(3) negligent breach of a qualified trust by trustees and interested parties, 5 U.S.C. appendix 102(f)(6)(C)(ii), 5 CFR 2634.702(b);

(4) misuse of a public report, 5 U.S.C. appendix 105(c)(2), 5 CFR 2634.703; and

(5) violation of outside employment/activities provisions, 5 U.S.C. appendix 504(a), 5 CFR 2636.104(a).

In compliance with the 2015 Act and guidance issued by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), on June 28, 2016, the U.S. Office of Government Ethics (OGE) published in the **Federal Register** an interim final rule, 81 FR 41787 (June 28, 2016), that made the “catch up” inflationary adjustments to the five Ethics Act CMPs. On January 24, 2017, OGE published in the **Federal Register** a rule adopting as final that interim regulation, and also making the 2017 annual inflationary adjustments to the Ethics Act CMPs. See 82 FR 8131 (Jan. 24, 2017).

This rulemaking effectuates the 2018 annual inflationary adjustments to the Ethics Act CMPs. In accordance with the 2015 Act, these adjustments are based on the percent change between the Consumer Price Index for all Urban Consumers (CPI-U) for the month of October preceding the date of the adjustment, and the prior year’s October

CPI-U. Pursuant to OMB guidance, the cost-of-living adjustment multiplier for 2018, based on the CPI-U for October 2017, not seasonally adjusted, is 1.02041. To calculate the 2018 annual adjustment, agencies must multiply the most recent penalty by the 1.02041 multiplier, and round to the nearest dollar.

Applying the formula established by the 2015 Act and OMB guidance, OGE is amending the Ethics Act CMPs through this rulemaking to:

(1) Increase the three penalties reflected in 5 CFR 2634.702(a), 5 CFR 2634.703, and 5 CFR 2636.104(a)—which were previously adjusted to a maximum of \$19,246—to a maximum of \$19,639;

(2) Increase the penalty reflected in 5 CFR 2634.702(b)—which was previously adjusted to a maximum of \$9,623—to a maximum of \$9,819; and

(3) Increase the penalty reflected in 5 CFR 2634.701(b)—which was previously adjusted to a maximum of \$57,847—to a maximum of \$59,028.

These adjusted penalty amounts will apply to penalties assessed after January 15, 2018 (the applicability date of this final rule) whose associated violations occurred after November 2, 2015.

OGE will continue to make future annual inflationary adjustments to the Ethics Act CMPs in accordance with the statutory formula set forth in the 2015 Act and OMB guidance.

II. Matters of Regulatory Procedure

Administrative Procedure Act

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b), as Acting Director of the Office of Government Ethics, I find that good cause exists for waiving the general notice of proposed rulemaking and public comment procedures as to these technical amendments. The notice and comment procedures are being waived because these amendments, which concern matters of agency organization, procedure and practice, are being adopted in accordance with statutorily mandated inflation adjustment procedures of the 2015 Act, which specifies that agencies shall adjust civil monetary penalties notwithstanding Section 553 of the Administrative Procedure Act. It is also in the public interest that the adjusted rates for civil monetary penalties under the Ethics in Government Act become effective as

¹ OGE has previously determined, after consultation with the Department of Justice, that the \$200 late filing fee for public financial disclosure reports that are more than 30 days overdue (see section 104(d) of the Ethics Act, 5 U.S.C. appendix, 104(d), and 5 CFR 2634.704 of OGE’s regulations thereunder) is not a CMP as defined under the Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act, as amended. Therefore, that fee is not being adjusted in this rulemaking (nor was it adjusted by OGE in previous CMP rulemakings), and will remain at its current amount of \$200.

soon as possible in order to maintain their deterrent effect.

Regulatory Flexibility Act

As the Acting Director of the Office of Government Ethics, I certify under the Regulatory Flexibility Act (5 U.S.C. chapter 6) that this final rule would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities because it primarily affects current Federal executive branch employees.

Paperwork Reduction Act

The Paperwork Reduction Act (44 U.S.C. chapter 35) does not apply because this regulation does not contain information collection requirements that require approval of the Office of Management and Budget.

Unfunded Mandates Reform Act

For purposes of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995 (2 U.S.C. chapter 5, subchapter II), this rule would not significantly or uniquely affect small governments and will not result in increased expenditures by State, local, and tribal governments, in the aggregate, or by the private sector, of \$100 million or more (as adjusted for inflation) in any one year.

Executive Order 13563 and Executive Order 12866

Executive Orders 13563 and 12866 direct agencies to assess all costs and benefits of available regulatory alternatives and, if regulation is necessary, to select the regulatory approaches that maximize net benefits (including economic, environmental, public health and safety effects, distributive impacts, and equity). Executive Order 13563 emphasizes the importance of quantifying both costs and benefits, of reducing costs, of harmonizing rules, and of promoting flexibility. The Office of Management and Budget has determined that rulemakings such as this implementing annual inflationary adjustments under the 2015 Act are not significant regulatory actions under Executive Order 12866.

Executive Order 12988

As Acting Director of the Office of Government Ethics, I have reviewed this rule in light of section 3 of Executive Order 12988, Civil Justice Reform, and certify that it meets the applicable standards provided therein.

List of Subjects

5 CFR Part 2634

Certificates of divestiture, Conflict of interests, Government employees,

Penalties, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements, Trusts and trustees.

5 CFR Part 2636

Conflict of interests, Government employees, Penalties.

Dated: January 11, 2018.

David J. Apol,
Acting Director, U.S. Office of Government Ethics.

For the reasons set forth in the preamble, the U.S. Office of Government Ethics is amending 5 CFR parts 2634 and 2636 as follows:

PART 2634—EXECUTIVE BRANCH FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE, QUALIFIED TRUSTS, AND CERTIFICATES OF DIVESTITURE

■ 1. The authority citation for part 2634 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 5 U.S.C. App. (Ethics in Government Act of 1978); 26 U.S.C. 1043; Pub. L. 101–410, 104 Stat. 890, 28 U.S.C. 2461 note (Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act of 1990), as amended by Sec. 31001, Pub. L. 104–134, 110 Stat. 1321 (Debt Collection Improvement Act of 1996) and Sec. 701, Pub. L. 114–74 (Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act Improvements Act of 2015); E.O. 12674, 54 FR 15159, 3 CFR, 1989 Comp., p. 215, as modified by E.O. 12731, 55 FR 42547, 3 CFR, 1990 Comp., p. 306.

■ 2. Section 2634.701 is amended by revising paragraph (b) to read as follows:

§ 2634.701 Failure to file or falsifying reports.

* * * * *

(b) *Civil action.* The Attorney General may bring a civil action in any appropriate United States district court against any individual who knowingly and willfully falsifies or who knowingly and willfully fails to file or report any information required by filers of public reports under subpart B of this part. The court in which the action is brought may assess against the individual a civil monetary penalty in any amount, not to exceed the amounts set forth below, as provided by section 104(a) of the Act, as amended, and as adjusted in accordance with the inflation adjustment procedures prescribed in the Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act of 1990, as amended:

Date of violation	Penalty
Violation occurring between Sept. 14, 2007 and Nov. 2, 2015	\$50,000
Violation occurring after Nov. 2, 2015	59,028

* * * * *

■ 3. Section 2634.702 is revised to read as follows:

§ 2634.702 Breaches by trust fiduciaries and interested parties.

(a) The Attorney General may bring a civil action in any appropriate United States district court against any individual who knowingly and willfully violates the provisions of § 2634.408(d)(1) or (e)(1). The court in which the action is brought may assess against the individual a civil monetary penalty in any amount, not to exceed the amounts set forth below, as provided by section 102(f)(6)(C)(i) of the Act and as adjusted in accordance with the inflation adjustment procedures prescribed in the Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act of 1990, as amended:

Date of violation	Penalty
Violation occurring between Sept. 29, 1999 and Nov. 2, 2015	\$11,000
Violation occurring after Nov. 2, 2015	19,639

(b) The Attorney General may bring a civil action in any appropriate United States district court against any individual who negligently violates the provisions of § 2634.408(d)(1) or (e)(1). The court in which the action is brought may assess against the individual a civil monetary penalty in any amount, not to exceed the amounts set forth below, as provided by section 102(f)(6)(C)(ii) of the Act and as adjusted in accordance with the inflation adjustment procedures of the Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act of 1990, as amended:

Date of violation	Penalty
Violation occurring between Sept. 29, 1999 and Nov. 2, 2015	\$5,500
Violation occurring after Nov. 2, 2015	9,819

■ 4. Section 2634.703 is revised to read as follows:

§ 2634.703 Misuse of public reports.

(a) The Attorney General may bring a civil action against any person who obtains or uses a report filed under this part for any purpose prohibited by section 105(c)(1) of the Act, as incorporated in § 2634.603(f). The court in which the action is brought may assess against the person a civil monetary penalty in any amount, not to exceed the amounts set forth below, as provided by section 105(c)(2) of the Act and as adjusted in accordance with the

inflation adjustment procedures prescribed in the Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act of 1990, as amended:

Date of violation	Penalty
Violation occurring between Sept. 29, 1999 and Nov. 2, 2015	\$11,000
Violation occurring after Nov. 2, 2015	19,639

(b) This remedy shall be in addition to any other remedy available under statutory or common law.

PART 2636—LIMITATIONS ON OUTSIDE EARNED INCOME, EMPLOYMENT AND AFFILIATIONS FOR CERTAIN NONCAREER EMPLOYEES

■ 5. The authority citation for part 2636 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 5 U.S.C. App. (Ethics in Government Act of 1978); Pub. L. 101–410, 104 Stat. 890, 28 U.S.C. 2461 note (Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act of 1990), as amended by Sec. 31001, Pub. L. 104–134, 110 Stat. 1321 (Debt Collection Improvement Act of 1996) and Sec. 701, Pub. L. 114–74 (Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act Improvements Act of 2015); E.O. 12674, 54 FR 15159, 3 CFR, 1989 Comp., p. 215, as modified by E.O. 12731, 55 FR 42547, 3 CFR, 1990 Comp., p. 306.

■ 6. Section 2636.104 is amended by revising paragraph (a) to read as follows:

§ 2636.104 Civil, disciplinary and other action.

(a) *Civil action.* Except when the employee engages in conduct in good faith reliance upon an advisory opinion issued under § 2636.103, an employee who engages in any conduct in violation of the prohibitions, limitations and restrictions contained in this part may be subject to civil action under 5 U.S.C. app. 504(a) and a civil monetary penalty of not more than the amounts set forth below, as adjusted in accordance with the inflation adjustment procedures prescribed in the Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act of 1990, as amended, or the amount of the compensation the individual received for the prohibited conduct, whichever is greater.

Date of violation	Penalty
Violation occurring between Sept. 29, 1999 and Nov. 2, 2015	\$11,000
Violation occurring after Nov. 2, 2015	19,639

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[FR Doc. 2018–00688 Filed 1–16–18; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 6345–03–P

NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

10 CFR Part 50

[NRC–2012–0059]

RIN 3150–AJ13

Approval of American Society of Mechanical Engineers’ Code Cases

AGENCY: Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is amending its regulations to incorporate by reference (IBR) the latest revisions of three regulatory guides (RGs) approving new, revised, and reaffirmed Code Cases published by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME). This action allows nuclear power plant licensees and applicants for construction permits, operating licenses, combined licenses, standard design certifications, standard design approvals and manufacturing licenses to voluntarily use the Code Cases listed in these RGs as alternatives to engineering standards for the construction, inservice inspection (ISI), and inservice testing (IST) of nuclear power plant components. These engineering standards are set forth in the ASME’s Boiler and Pressure Vessel (BPV) Codes and ASME Operation and Maintenance (OM) Codes, which are currently incorporated by reference into the NRC’s regulations. This final rule announces the availability of the final versions of the three RGs that are being incorporated by reference. Further, the final rule announces the availability of a related RG, not incorporated by reference into the NRC’s regulations that lists Code Cases that the NRC has not approved for use.

DATES: This final rule is effective on February 16, 2018. The incorporation by reference of certain publications listed in the regulation is approved by the Director of the Federal Register as of February 16, 2018.

ADDRESSES: Please refer to Docket ID NRC–2012–0059 when contacting the NRC about the availability of information for this action. You may obtain publicly-available information related to this action by any of the following methods:

- *Federal Rulemaking Website:* Go to <http://www.regulations.gov> and search for Docket ID NRC–2012–0059. Address questions about NRC dockets to Carol Gallagher; telephone: 301–415–3463; email: Carol.Gallagher@nrc.gov. For technical questions contact the

individuals listed in the **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT** section of this document.

- *NRC’s Agencywide Documents Access and Management System (ADAMS):* You may obtain publicly-available documents online in the ADAMS Public Documents collection at <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams.html>. To begin the search, select “ADAMS Public Documents” and then select “Begin Web-based ADAMS Search.” For problems with ADAMS, please contact the NRC’s Public Document Room (PDR) reference staff at 1–800–397–4209, 301–415–4737, or by email to pdr.resource@nrc.gov. For the convenience of the reader, instructions about obtaining materials referenced in this document are provided in the “Availability of Documents” section.

- *NRC’s PDR:* You may examine and purchase copies of public documents at the NRC’s PDR, Room O1–F21, One White Flint North, 11555 Rockville Pike, Rockville, Maryland 20852.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jennifer Tobin, Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation, telephone: 301–415–2328, email: Jennifer.Tobin@nrc.gov; or Giovanni Facco, Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research, telephone: 301–415–6337; email: Giovanni.Facco@nrc.gov. Both are staff of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555–0001.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Executive Summary

The purpose of this regulatory action is to incorporate by reference into the NRC’s regulations the latest revisions of three RGs. The three RGs identify new, revised, and reaffirmed Code Cases published by the ASME, which the NRC has determined are acceptable for use as alternatives to certain provisions of the ASME BPV Codes and ASME OM Codes, currently incorporated by reference into the NRC’s regulations. The three RGs that the NRC is incorporating by reference are RG 1.84, “Design, Fabrication, and Materials Code Case Acceptability, ASME Section III,” Revision 37; RG 1.147, “Inservice Inspection Code Case Acceptability, ASME Section XI, Division 1,” Revision 18; and RG 1.192, “Operation and Maintenance Code Case Acceptability, ASME OM Code,” Revision 2. This regulatory action allows nuclear power plant licensees and applicants for construction permits, operating licenses, combined licenses, standard design certifications, standard design approvals, and manufacturing licenses to voluntarily use the Code Cases, newly listed in these revised RGs, as