

§ 21.3

§ 21.3 Department responsibilities.

(a) Each Departmental unit which has delinquent debts owed under its program is responsible for collecting its claims by means of administrative offset when appropriate and best suited to further and protect all the Government's interests.

(b) The Departmental unit head (or designee) will determine the feasibility and cost effectiveness of collection by administrative offset on a case-by-case basis, exercising sound discretion in pursuing such offsets, and will consider the following:

(1) The debtor's financial condition;

(2) Whether offset would substantially interfere with or defeat the purposes of the Federal program authorizing the payments against which offset is contemplated; and

(3) Whether offset best serves to further and protect all of the interests of the United States.

(c) Before advising the debtor that the delinquent debt will be subject to administrative offset, the Departmental unit workout group shall review the claim and determine that the debt is valid and overdue. In the case where a debt arises under the programs of two or more Department of Commerce units, or in such other instances as the Assistant Secretary for Administration or his/her designee may deem appropriate, the Assistant Secretary, or his or her designee, may determine which Departmental unit workout group or official(s) shall have responsibility for carrying out the provisions of this subpart.

(d) Administrative offset shall be considered by Department units only after attempting to collect a claim under section 3(a) of the Federal Claims Collection Act of 1966, as amended; except that no claim under this Act that has been outstanding for more than 10 years after the debt first accrued may be collected by means of administrative offset, unless facts, material to the right to collect the debt, were not known and could not reasonably have been known by the official of the Department who was charged with the responsibility to discover and collect such debts. When the debt first accrued should be determined according

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to existing laws regarding the accrual of debts, such as under 28 U.S.C. 2415.

§ 21.4 Notification requirements before offset.

A debt is considered delinquent by the Department if it is not paid within 15 days of the due date, or if there is no due date, within 30 days of the billing date.

(a) The Departmental unit head (and designees) responsible for carrying out the provisions of this subpart with respect to the debt shall ensure that appropriate written demands are sent to the debtor in terms which inform the debtor of the consequences of failure to cooperate in payment of the debt. The first demand letter should be sent within ten (10) days after the date the debt becomes delinquent. A total of three progressively stronger written demand letters, at not more than 30 calendar day intervals, will normally be made unless (1) a response to the first or second demand indicates that a further demand would be futile; (2) the debtor's response does not require any or immediate rebuttal; and/or (3) the bureau determines to pursue offset under the procedures specified in 4 CFR 102.3, Collection by Administrative Offset. In determining the timing of the demand letters, Departmental unit heads should give due regard to the need to act promptly; so as a general rule, if it is necessary to refer the debt to the Department of Justice for action, such referral can be made within one year of the final determination of the facts and the amount of the debt. When Departmental unit heads (and designees) deem it appropriate to protect the Government's interests (for example, to prevent the statute of limitations, 28 U.S.C. 2415, from expiring), written demand for payment may be preceded by other appropriate collection actions (also see § 21.10(c)).

(b) The Department official responsible for collection of the debt (generally an accounting or finance officer) shall ensure that an initial written demand notice is sent to the debtor, informing such debtor of:

(1) The amount and basis for the indebtedness and whatever rights the debtor may have to seek review within the Department;

(2) The applicable standards for assessing interest, penalties, and administrative costs (4 CFR 102.13);

(3) That the debtor has a right to inspect and copy Department records related to the debt, as determined by responsible Departmental official(s), and that such request to inspect and copy must be postmarked or received by the Department no later than 30 days after the date of the (first) demand letter;

(4) The name, mailing address, and telephone number of the Department workout group employee who can provide a full explanation of the claim and answer all related questions, as well as explain procedures to the debtor for inspecting and copying records related to the debt.

(c) The responsible Department officials shall exercise due care to insure that demand letters are mailed or hand delivered on the same day that they are actually dated. If evidence suggests that the debtor is no longer located at the address of record, reasonable action shall be taken by the Departmental unit workout group to obtain a current address, including skip-trace assistance from the Internal Revenue Service and/or private sector credit reporting bureaus.

(d) Where applicable, the Departmental unit workout group must inform the debtor in a second demand letter, (Notice of Intent) of:

(1) The nature and amount of the debt;

(2) That the Department intends to collect the debt by administrative offset until the debt and all accumulated interest and other charges are paid in full;

(3) That the debtor has a right to obtain review within the Department of the initial determination of indebtedness, and that such request to have a review of the basis of indebtedness must be postmarked or received by the Department no later than 30 days after the date of the second demand letter (Notice of Intent); and

(4) That the debtor may enter into a written agreement with the responsible Department official(s) to repay the debt if such a request is made and received by the Department no later than 30 days after the date of the second demand letter (Notice of Intent).

If the sum of the proposed offset does not fully cover the amount of the debt owed, the Departmental unit workout group shall also include in this second demand letter (Notice of Intent) the notice provisions to debtors required by the Debt Collection Act of 1982, and other regulations of the Department, pertaining to disclosure of the delinquent debt to credit reporting agencies, referral to private collection agencies, salary offset, possible Internal Revenue Service offset of tax refunds, and referral of the debt to the Justice Department for action to the extent inclusion of such is appropriate and practical.

(5) That if payment or a request for review is not received within the 30-day period, the offset process will be initiated.

§21.5 Exceptions to notification requirements.

(a) In cases where the notice specified in §21.4 has previously been provided to the debtor in connection with the same debt under some other proceeding, such as a final audit resolution determination, the Department is not required to duplicate those requirements before effecting administrative offset.

(b) If the time before payment is to be made to the debtor does not reasonably permit the completion of the procedures specified in §21.4, and failure to take offset would substantially prejudice the Government's ability to collect the debt, then administrative offset action will be taken without notification. The offset will be promptly followed by the completion of the procedures specified in §21.4 (also see §21.10(c)).

§21.6 Written agreement to repay debt.

(a) A debtor will be provided with an opportunity to enter into a written agreement with the responsible Departmental official(s) to repay the debt owed if the following conditions are met and if specific conditions exist that limit his or her ability to immediately repay the debt.

(1) *Notification by debtor.* The debtor may, in response to the first written demand or Notice of Intent, propose a written agreement for delayed lump