

§ 401.6

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contracting officer so that the *contracting officer* may evaluate and determine their effectiveness.

[52 FR 8554, Mar. 18, 1987, as amended at 60 FR 41812, Aug. 14, 1995]

§ 401.6 Exercise of march-in rights.

(a) The following procedures shall govern the exercise of the march-in rights of the agencies set forth in 35 U.S.C. 203 and paragraph (j) of the clause at § 401.14.

(b) Whenever an agency receives information that it believes might warrant the exercise of march-in rights, before initiating any march-in proceeding, it shall notify the contractor in writing of the information and request informal written or oral comments from the contractor as well as information relevant to the matter. In the absence of any comments from the contractor within 30 days, the agency may, at its discretion, proceed with the procedures below. If a comment is received within 30 days, or later if the agency has not initiated the procedures below, then the agency shall, within 60 days after it receives the comment, either initiate the procedures below or notify the contractor, in writing, that it will not pursue march-in rights on the basis of the available information.

(c) A march-in proceeding shall be initiated by the issuance of a written notice by the agency to the contractor and its assignee or exclusive licensee, as applicable and if known to the agency, stating that the agency is considering the exercise of march-in rights. The notice shall state the reasons for the proposed march-in in terms sufficient to put the contractor on notice of the facts upon which the action would be based and shall specify the field or fields of use in which the agency is considering requiring licensing. The notice shall advise the contractor (assignee or exclusive licensee) of its rights, as set forth in this section and in any supplemental agency regulations. The determination to exercise march-in rights shall be made by the head of the agency or his or her designee.

(d) Within 30 days after the receipt of the written notice of march-in, the contractor (assignee or exclusive licensee) may submit in person, in writing, or through a representative, infor-

mation or argument in opposition to the proposed march-in, including any additional specific information which raises a genuine dispute over the material facts upon which the march-in is based. If the information presented raises a genuine dispute over the material facts, the head of the agency or designee shall undertake or refer the matter to another official for fact-finding.

(e) Fact-finding shall be conducted in accordance with the procedures established by the agency. Such procedures shall be as informal as practicable and be consistent with principles of fundamental fairness. The procedures should afford the contractor the opportunity to appear with counsel, submit documentary evidence, present witnesses and confront such persons as the agency may present. A transcribed record shall be made and shall be available at cost to the contractor upon request. The requirement for a transcribed record may be waived by mutual agreement of the contractor and the agency. Any portion of the march-in proceeding, including a fact-finding hearing that involves testimony or evidence relating to the utilization or efforts at obtaining utilization that are being made by the contractor, its assignee, or licensees shall be closed to the public, including potential licensees. In accordance with 35 U.S.C. 202(c)(5), agencies shall not disclose any such information obtained during a march-in proceeding to persons outside the government except when such release is authorized by the contractor (assignee or licensee).

(f) The official conducting the fact-finding shall prepare or adopt written findings of fact and transmit them to the head of the agency or designee promptly after the conclusion of the fact-finding proceeding along with a recommended determination. A copy of the findings of fact shall be sent to the contractor (assignee or exclusive licensee) by registered or certified mail. The contractor (assignee or exclusive licensee) and agency representatives will be given 30 days to submit written arguments to the head of the agency or

designee; and, upon request by the contractor oral arguments will be held before the agency head or designee that will make the final determination.

(g) In cases in which fact-finding has been conducted, the head of the agency or designee shall base his or her determination on the facts found, together with any other information and written or oral arguments submitted by the contractor (assignee or exclusive licensee) and agency representatives, and any other information in the administrative record. The consistency of the exercise of march-in rights with the policy and objectives of 35 U.S.C. 200 shall also be considered. In cases referred for fact-finding, the head of the agency or designee may reject only those facts that have been found to be clearly erroneous, but must explicitly state the rejection and indicate the basis for the contrary finding. Written notice of the determination whether march-in rights will be exercised shall be made by the head of the agency or designee and sent to the contractor (assignee or exclusive licensee) by certified or registered mail within 90 days after the completion of fact-finding or 90 days after oral arguments, whichever is later, or the proceedings will be deemed to have been terminated and thereafter no march-in based on the facts and reasons upon which the proceeding was initiated may be exercised.

(h) An agency may, at any time, terminate a march-in proceeding if it is satisfied that it does not wish to exercise march-in rights.

(i) The procedures of this part shall also apply to the exercise of march-in rights against inventors receiving title to subject inventions under 35 U.S.C. 202(d) and, for that purpose, the term "contractor" as used in this section shall be deemed to include the inventor.

(j) An agency determination unfavorable to the contractor (assignee or exclusive licensee) shall be held in abeyance pending the exhaustion of appeals or petitions filed under 35 U.S.C. 203(2).

(k) For purposes of this section the term *exclusive licensee* includes a partially exclusive licensee.

(l) Agencies are authorized to issue supplemental procedures not incon-

sistent with this part for the conduct of march-in proceedings.

§ 401.7 Small business preference.

(a) Paragraph (k)(4) of the clauses at § 401.14 Implements the small business preference requirement of 35 U.S.C. 202(c)(7)(D). Contractors are expected to use efforts that are reasonable under the circumstances to attract small business licensees. They are also expected to give small business firms that meet the standard outlined in the clause a preference over other applicants for licenses. What constitutes reasonable efforts to attract small business licensees will vary with the circumstances and the nature, duration, and expense of efforts needed to bring the invention to the market. Paragraph (k)(4) is not intended, for example, to prevent nonprofit organizations from providing larger firms with a right of first refusal or other options in inventions that relate to research being supported under long-term or other arrangements with larger companies. Under such circumstances it would not be reasonable to seek and to give a preference to small business licensees.

(b) Small business firms that believe a nonprofit organization is not meeting its obligations under the clause may report their concerns to the Secretary. To the extent deemed appropriate, the Secretary will undertake informal investigation of the concern, and, if appropriate, enter into discussions or negotiations with the nonprofit organization to the end of improving its efforts in meeting its obligations under the clause. However, in no event will the Secretary intervene in ongoing negotiations or contractor decisions concerning the licensing of a specific subject invention. All the above investigations, discussions, and negotiations of the Secretary will be in coordination with other interested agencies, including the Small Business Administration; and in the case of a contract for the operation of a government-owned, contractor operated research or production facility, the Secretary will coordinate with the agency responsible for the facility prior to any discussions or negotiations with the contractor.