

retroactive termination if timely payment is not made. Similarly, if the plan cancels coverage if it has not received payment by the first day of a period of coverage but retroactively reinstates coverage if payment is made by the end of the grace period for that period of coverage, then the plan must inform the provider that the qualified beneficiary currently does not have coverage but will have coverage retroactively to the first date of the period if timely payment is made. (See paragraph (b) of Q&A-3 in § 54.4980B-6 for similar rules that the plan must follow in confirming coverage during the election period.)

(d) If timely payment is made to the plan in an amount that is not significantly less than the amount the plan requires to be paid for a period of coverage, then the amount paid is deemed to satisfy the plan's requirement for the amount that must be paid, unless the plan notifies the qualified beneficiary of the amount of the deficiency and grants a reasonable period of time for payment of the deficiency to be made. For this purpose, as a safe harbor, 30 days after the date the notice is provided is deemed to be a reasonable period of time. An amount is not significantly less than the amount the plan requires to be paid for a period of coverage if and only if the shortfall is no greater than the lesser of the following two amounts:

(1) Fifty dollars (or such other amount as the Commissioner may provide in a revenue ruling, notice, or other guidance published in the Internal Revenue Bulletin (see § 601.601(d)(2)(ii) of this chapter)); or

(2) 10 percent of the amount the plan requires to be paid.

(e) Payment is considered made on the date on which it is sent to the plan.

[T.D. 8812, 64 FR 5186, Feb. 3, 1999, as amended by T.D. 8928, 66 FR 1854, Jan. 10, 2001]

§ 54.4980B-9 Business reorganizations and employer withdrawals from multiemployer plans.

The following questions-and-answers address who has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to affected qualified beneficiaries in the context of business reorganiza-

tions and employer withdrawals from multiemployer plans:

Q-1: For purposes of this section, what are a business reorganization, a stock sale, and an asset sale?

A-1: For purposes of this section:

(a) A *business reorganization* is a stock sale or an asset sale.

(b) A *stock sale* is a transfer of stock in a corporation that causes the corporation to become a different employer or a member of a different employer. (See Q&A-2 of § 54.4980B-2, which defines *employer* to include all members of a controlled group of corporations.) Thus, for example, a sale or distribution of stock in a corporation that causes the corporation to cease to be a member of one controlled group of corporations, whether or not it becomes a member of another controlled group of corporations, is a stock sale.

(c) An *asset sale* is a transfer of substantial assets, such as a plant or division or substantially all the assets of a trade or business.

(d) The rules of § 1.414(b)-1 of this chapter apply in determining what constitutes a controlled group of corporations, and the rules of §§ 1.414(c)-1 through 1.414(c)-5 of this chapter apply in determining what constitutes a group of trades or businesses under common control.

Q-2: In the case of a stock sale, what are the selling group, the acquired organization, and the buying group?

A-2: In the case of a stock sale—

(a) The *selling group* is the controlled group of corporations, or the group of trades or businesses under common control, of which a corporation ceases to be a member as a result of the stock sale;

(b) The *acquired organization* is the corporation that ceases to be a member of the selling group as a result of the stock sale; and

(c) The *buying group* is the controlled group of corporations, or the group of trades or businesses under common control, of which the acquired organization becomes a member as a result of the stock sale. If the acquired organization does not become a member of such a group, the *buying group* is the acquired organization.

Q-3: In the case of an asset sale, what are the selling group and the buying group?

A-3: In the case of an asset sale—

(a) The *selling group* is the controlled group of corporations or the group of trades or businesses under common control that includes the corporation or other trade or business that is selling the assets; and

(b) The *buying group* is the controlled group of corporations or the group of trades or businesses under common control that includes the corporation or other trade or business that is buying the assets.

Q-4: Who is an M&A qualified beneficiary?

A-4: (a) Asset sales: In the case of an asset sale, an individual is an M&A qualified beneficiary if the individual is a qualified beneficiary whose qualifying event occurred prior to or in connection with the sale and who is, or whose qualifying event occurred in connection with, a covered employee whose last employment prior to the qualifying event was associated with the assets being sold.

(b) Stock sales: In the case of a stock sale, an individual is an M&A qualified beneficiary if the individual is a qualified beneficiary whose qualifying event occurred prior to or in connection with the sale and who is, or whose qualifying event occurred in connection with, a covered employee whose last employment prior to the qualifying event was with the acquired organization.

(c) In the case of a qualified beneficiary who has experienced more than one qualifying event with respect to her or his current right to COBRA continuation coverage, the qualifying event referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b) of this Q&A-4 is the first qualifying event.

Q-5: In the case of a stock sale, is the sale a qualifying event with respect to a covered employee who is employed by the acquired organization before the sale and who continues to be employed by the acquired organization after the sale, or with respect to the spouse or dependent children of such a covered employee?

A-5: No. A covered employee who continues to be employed by the ac-

quired organization after the sale does not experience a termination of employment as a result of the sale. Accordingly, the sale is not a qualifying event with respect to the covered employee, or with respect to the covered employee's spouse or dependent children, regardless of whether they are provided with group health coverage after the sale, and neither the covered employee, nor the covered employee's spouse or dependent children, become qualified beneficiaries as a result of the sale.

Q-6: In the case of an asset sale, is the sale a qualifying event with respect to a covered employee whose employment immediately before the sale was associated with the purchased assets, or with respect to the spouse or dependent children of such a covered employee who are covered under a group health plan of the selling group immediately before the sale?

A-6: (a) Yes, unless—

(1) The buying group is a successor employer under paragraph (c) of Q&A-8 of this section or Q&A-2 of § 54.4980B-2, and the covered employee is employed by the buying group immediately after the sale; or

(2) The covered employee (or the spouse or any dependent child of the covered employee) does not lose coverage (within the meaning of paragraph (c) in Q&A-1 of § 54.4980B-4) under a group health plan of the selling group after the sale.

(b) Unless the conditions in paragraph (a)(1) or (2) of this Q&A-6 are satisfied, such a covered employee experiences a termination of employment with the selling group as a result of the asset sale, regardless of whether the covered employee is employed by the buying group or whether the covered employee's employment is associated with the purchased assets after the sale. Accordingly, the covered employee, and the spouse and dependent children of the covered employee who lose coverage under a plan of the selling group in connection with the sale, are M&A qualified beneficiaries in connection with the sale.

Q-7: In a business reorganization, are the buying group and the selling group permitted to allocate by contract the

responsibility to make COBRA continuation coverage available to M&A qualified beneficiaries?

A-7: Yes. Nothing in this section prohibits a selling group and a buying group from allocating to one or the other of the parties in a purchase agreement the responsibility to provide the coverage required under §§ 54.4980B-1 through 54.4980B-10. However, if and to the extent that the party assigned this responsibility under the terms of the contract fails to perform, the party who has the obligation under Q&A-8 of this section to make COBRA continuation coverage available to M&A qualified beneficiaries continues to have that obligation.

Q-8: Which group health plan has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to M&A qualified beneficiaries in a business reorganization?

A-8: (a) In the case of a business reorganization (whether a stock sale or an asset sale), so long as the selling group maintains a group health plan after the sale, a group health plan maintained by the selling group has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to M&A qualified beneficiaries with respect to that sale. This Q&A-8 prescribes rules for cases in which the selling group ceases to provide any group health plan to any employee in connection with the sale. Paragraph (b) of this Q&A-8 contains these rules for stock sales, and paragraph (c) of this Q&A-8 contains these rules for asset sales. Neither a stock sale nor an asset sale has any effect on the COBRA continuation coverage requirements applicable to any group health plan for any period before the sale.

(b)(1) In the case of a stock sale, if the selling group ceases to provide any group health plan to any employee in connection with the sale, a group health plan maintained by the buying group has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to M&A qualified beneficiaries with respect to that stock sale. A group health plan of the buying group has this obligation beginning on the later of the following two dates and continuing as long as the buying group

continues to maintain a group health plan (but subject to the rules in § 54.4980B-7, relating to the duration of COBRA continuation coverage)—

(i) The date the selling group ceases to provide any group health plan to any employee; or

(ii) The date of the stock sale.

(2) The determination of whether the selling group's cessation of providing any group health plan to any employee is in connection with the stock sale is based on all of the relevant facts and circumstances. A group health plan of the buying group does not, as a result of the stock sale, have an obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to those qualified beneficiaries of the selling group who are not M&A qualified beneficiaries with respect to that sale.

(c)(1) In the case of an asset sale, if the selling group ceases to provide any group health plan to any employee in connection with the sale and if the buying group continues the business operations associated with the assets purchased from the selling group without interruption or substantial change, then the buying group is a successor employer to the selling group in connection with that asset sale. A buying group does not fail to be a successor employer in connection with an asset sale merely because the asset sale takes place in connection with a proceeding in bankruptcy under Title 11 of the United States Code. If the buying group is a successor employer, a group health plan maintained by the buying group has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to M&A qualified beneficiaries with respect to that asset sale. A group health plan of the buying group has this obligation beginning on the later of the following two dates and continuing as long as the buying group continues to maintain a group health plan (but subject to the rules in § 54.4980B-7, relating to the duration of COBRA continuation coverage)—

(i) The date the selling group ceases to provide any group health plan to any employee; or

(ii) The date of the asset sale.

(2) The determination of whether the selling group's cessation of providing any group health plan to any employee

is in connection with the asset sale is based on all of the relevant facts and circumstances. A group health plan of the buying group does not, as a result of the asset sale, have an obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to those qualified beneficiaries of the selling group who are not M&A qualified beneficiaries with respect to that sale.

(d) The rules of Q&A-1 through Q&A-7 of this section and this Q&A-8 are illustrated by the following examples; in each example, each group health plan is subject to COBRA:

Stock Sale Examples

Example 1. (i) Selling Group *S* consists of three corporations, *A*, *B*, and *C*. Buying Group *P* consists of two corporations, *D* and *E*. *P* enters into a contract to purchase all the stock of *C* from *S* effective July 1, 2002. Before the sale of *C*, *S* maintains a single group health plan for the employees of *A*, *B*, and *C* (and their families). *P* maintains a single group health plan for the employees of *D* and *E* (and their families). Effective July 1, 2002, the employees of *C* (and their families) become covered under *P*'s plan. On June 30, 2002, there are 48 qualified beneficiaries receiving COBRA continuation coverage under *S*'s plan, 15 of whom are M&A qualified beneficiaries with respect to the sale of *C*. (The other 33 qualified beneficiaries had qualifying events in connection with a covered employee whose last employment before the qualifying event was with either *A* or *B*.)

(ii) Under these facts, *S*'s plan continues to have the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to the 15 M&A qualified beneficiaries under *S*'s plan after the sale of *C* to *P*. The employees who continue in employment with *C* do not experience a qualifying event by virtue of *P*'s acquisition of *C*. If they experience a qualifying event after the sale, then the group health plan of *P* has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to them.

Example 2. (i) Selling Group *S* consists of three corporations, *A*, *B*, and *C*. Each of *A*, *B*, and *C* maintains a group health plan for its employees (and their families). Buying Group *P* consists of two corporations, *D* and *E*. *P* enters into a contract to purchase all of the stock of *C* from *S* effective July 1, 2002. As of June 30, 2002, there are 14 qualified beneficiaries receiving COBRA continuation coverage under *C*'s plan. *C* continues to employ all of its employees and continues to maintain its group health plan after being acquired by *P* on July 1, 2002.

(ii) Under these facts, *C* is an acquired organization and the 14 qualified beneficiaries

under *C*'s plan are M&A qualified beneficiaries. A group health plan of *S* (that is, either the plan maintained by *A* or the plan maintained by *B*) has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to the 14 M&A qualified beneficiaries. *S* and *P* could negotiate to have *C*'s plan continue to make COBRA continuation coverage available to the 14 M&A qualified beneficiaries. In such a case, neither *A*'s plan nor *B*'s plan would make COBRA continuation coverage available to the 14 M&A qualified beneficiaries unless *C*'s plan failed to fulfill its contractual responsibility to make COBRA continuation coverage available to the M&A qualified beneficiaries. *C*'s employees (and their spouses and dependent children) do not experience a qualifying event in connection with *P*'s acquisition of *C*, and consequently no plan maintained by either *P* or *S* has any obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to *C*'s employees (or their spouses or dependent children) in connection with the transfer of stock in *C* from *S* to *P*.

Example 3. (i) The facts are the same as in *Example 2*, except that *C* ceases to employ two employees on June 30, 2002, and those two employees never become covered under *P*'s plan.

(ii) Under these facts, the two employees experience a qualifying event on June 30, 2002 because their termination of employment causes a loss of group health coverage. A group health plan of *S* (that is, either the plan maintained by *A* or the plan maintained by *B*) has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to the two employees (and to any spouse or dependent child of the two employees who loses coverage under *C*'s plan in connection with the termination of employment of the two employees) because they are M&A qualified beneficiaries with respect to the sale of *C*.

Example 4. (i) Selling Group *S* consists of three corporations, *A*, *B*, and *C*. Buying Group *P* consists of two corporations, *D* and *E*. *P* enters into a contract to purchase all of the stock of *C* from *S* effective July 1, 2002. Before the sale of *C*, *S* maintains a single group health plan for the employees of *A*, *B*, and *C* (and their families). *P* maintains a single group health plan for the employees of *D* and *E* (and their families). Effective July 1, 2002, the employees of *C* (and their families) become covered under *P*'s plan. On June 30, 2002, there are 25 qualified beneficiaries receiving COBRA continuation coverage under *S*'s plan, 20 of whom are M&A qualified beneficiaries with respect to the sale of *C*. (The other five qualified beneficiaries had qualifying events in connection with a covered employee whose last employment before the qualifying event was with either *A* or *B*.) *S* terminates its group health plan effective June 30, 2002 and begins to liquidate the assets of *A* and *B* and to lay off the employees of *A* and *B*.

(ii) Under these facts, *S* ceases to provide a group health plan to any employee in connection with the sale of *C* to *P*. Thus, beginning July 1, 2002 *P*'s plan has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to the 20 M&A qualified beneficiaries, but *P* is not obligated to make COBRA continuation coverage available to the other 5 qualified beneficiaries with respect to *S*'s plan as of June 30, 2002 or to any of the employees of *A* or *B* whose employment is terminated by *S* (or to any of those employees' spouses or dependent children).

Asset Sale Examples

Example 5. (i) Selling Group *S* provides group health plan coverage to employees at each of its operating divisions. *S* sells the assets of one of its divisions to Buying Group *P*. Under the terms of the group health plan covering the employees at the division being sold, their coverage will end on the date of the sale. *P* hires all but one of those employees, gives them the same positions that they had with *S* before the sale, and provides them with coverage under a group health plan. Immediately before the sale, there are two qualified beneficiaries receiving COBRA continuation coverage under a group health plan of *S* whose qualifying events occurred in connection with a covered employee whose last employment prior to the qualifying event was associated with the assets sold to *P*.

(ii) These two qualified beneficiaries are M&A qualified beneficiaries with respect to the asset sale to *P*. Under these facts, a group health plan of *S* retains the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to these two M&A qualified beneficiaries. In addition, the one employee *P* does not hire as well as all of the employees *P* hires (and the spouses and dependent children of these employees) who were covered under a group health plan of *S* on the day before the sale are M&A qualified beneficiaries with respect to the sale. A group health plan of *S* also has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to these M&A qualified beneficiaries.

Example 6. (i) Selling Group *S* provides group health plan coverage to employees at each of its operating divisions. *S* sells substantially all of the assets of all of its divisions to Buying Group *P*, and *S* ceases to provide any group health plan to any employee on the date of the sale. *P* hires all but one of *S*'s employees on the date of the asset sale by *S*, gives those employees the same positions that they had with *S* before the sale, and continues the business operations of those divisions without substantial change or interruption. *P* provides these employees with coverage under a group health plan. Immediately before the sale, there are 10 qualified beneficiaries receiving COBRA continuation coverage under a group health plan of

S whose qualifying events occurred in connection with a covered employee whose last employment prior to the qualifying event was associated with the assets sold to *P*.

(ii) These 10 qualified beneficiaries are M&A qualified beneficiaries with respect to the asset sale to *P*. Under these facts, *P* is a successor employer described in paragraph (c) of this Q&A-8. Thus, a group health plan of *P* has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to these 10 M&A qualified beneficiaries.

(iii) The one employee that *P* does not hire and the family members of that employee are also M&A qualified beneficiaries with respect to the sale. A group health plan of *P* also has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to these M&A qualified beneficiaries.

(iv) The employees who continue in employment in connection with the asset sale (and their family members) and who were covered under a group health plan of *S* on the day before the sale are not M&A qualified beneficiaries because *P* is a successor employer to *S* in connection with the asset sale. Thus, no group health plan of *P* has any obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to these continuing employees with respect to the qualifying event that resulted from their losing coverage under *S*'s plan in connection with the asset sale.

Example 7. (i) Selling Group *S* provides group health plan coverage to employees at each of its two operating divisions. *S* sells the assets of one of its divisions to Buying Group *P1*. Under the terms of the group health plan covering the employees at the division being sold, their coverage will end on the date of the sale. *P1* hires all but one of those employees, gives them the same positions that they had with *S* before the sale, and provides them with coverage under a group health plan.

(ii) Under these facts, a group health plan of *S* has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to M&A qualified beneficiaries with respect to the sale to *P1*. (If an M&A qualified beneficiary first became covered under *P1*'s plan after electing COBRA continuation coverage under *S*'s plan, then *S*'s plan could terminate the COBRA continuation coverage once the M&A qualified beneficiary became covered under *P1*'s plan, provided that the remaining conditions of Q&A-2 of § 54.4980B-7 were satisfied.)

(iii) Several months after the sale to *P1*, *S* sells the assets of its remaining division to Buying Group *P2*, and *S* ceases to provide any group health plan to any employee on the date of that sale. Thus, under Q&A-1 of § 54.4980B-7, *S* ceases to have an obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to any qualified beneficiary on the date of the sale to *P2*. *P1* and *P2* are unrelated organizations.

(iv) Even if it was foreseeable that *S* would sell its remaining division to an unrelated third party after the sale to *P1*, under these facts the cessation of *S* to provide any group health plan to any employee on the date of the sale to *P2* is not in connection with the asset sale to *P1*. Thus, even after the date *S* ceases to provide any group health plan to any employee, no group health plan of *P1* has any obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to M&A qualified beneficiaries with respect to the asset sale to *P1* by *S*. If *P2* is a successor employer under the rules of paragraph (c) of this Q&A-8 and maintains one or more group health plans after the sale, then a group health plan of *P2* would have an obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to M&A qualified beneficiaries with respect to the asset sale to *P2* by *S* (but in such a case employees of *S* before the sale who continued working for *P2* after the sale would not be M&A qualified beneficiaries). However, even in such a case, no group health plan of *P2* would have an obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to M&A qualified beneficiaries with respect to the asset sale to *P1* by *S*. Thus, under these facts, after *S* has ceased to provide any group health plan to any employee, no plan has an obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to M&A qualified beneficiaries with respect to the asset sale to *P1*.

Example 8. (i) Selling Group *S* provides group health plan coverage to employees at each of its operating divisions. *S* sells substantially all of the assets of all of its divisions to Buying Group *P*. *P* hires most of *S*'s employees on the date of the purchase of *S*'s assets, retains those employees in the same positions that they had with *S* before the purchase, and continues the business operations of those divisions without substantial change or interruption. *P* provides these employees with coverage under a group health plan. *S* continues to employ a few employees for the principal purpose of winding up the affairs of *S* in preparation for liquidation. *S* continues to provide coverage under a group health plan to these few remaining employees for several weeks after the date of the sale and then ceases to provide any group health plan to any employee.

(ii) Under these facts, the cessation by *S* to provide any group health plan to any employee is in connection with the asset sale to *P*. Because of this, and because *P* continued the business operations associated with those assets without substantial change or interruption, *P* is a successor employer to *S* with respect to the asset sale. Thus, a group health plan of *P* has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to M&A qualified beneficiaries with respect to the sale beginning on the date that *S* ceases to provide any group health plan to any employee. (A group health plan of *S* retains this

obligation for the several weeks after the date of the sale until *S* ceases to provide any group health plan to any employee.)

Q-9: Can the cessation of contributions by an employer to a multiemployer group health plan be a qualifying event?

A-9: The cessation of contributions by an employer to a multiemployer group health plan is not itself a qualifying event, even though the cessation of contributions may cause current employees (and their spouses and dependent children) to lose coverage under the multiemployer plan. An event coinciding with the employer's cessation of contributions (such as a reduction of hours of employment in the case of striking employees) will constitute a qualifying event if it otherwise satisfies the requirements of Q&A-1 of §54.4980B-4.

Q-10: If an employer stops contributing to a multiemployer group health plan, does the multiemployer plan have the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to a qualified beneficiary who was receiving coverage under the multiemployer plan on the day before the cessation of contributions and who is, or whose qualifying event occurred in connection with, a covered employee whose last employment prior to the qualifying event was with the employer that has stopped contributing to the multiemployer plan?

A-10: (a) In general, yes. (See Q&A-3 of §54.4980B-2 for a definition of *multiemployer plan*.) If, however, the employer that stops contributing to the multiemployer plan makes group health plan coverage available to (or starts contributing to another multiemployer plan that is a group health plan with respect to) a class of the employer's employees formerly covered under the multiemployer plan, the plan maintained by the employer (or the other multiemployer plan), from that date forward, has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to any qualified beneficiary who was receiving coverage under the multiemployer plan on the day before the cessation of contributions and who is, or whose qualifying event occurred in connection with, a covered employee whose last employment prior to the

qualifying event was with the employer.

(b) The rules of Q&A-9 of this section and this Q&A-10 are illustrated by the following examples; in each example, each group health plan is subject to COBRA:

Example 1. (i) Employer *Z* employs a class of employees covered by a collective bargaining agreement and participating in multiemployer group health plan *M*. As required by the collective bargaining agreement, *Z* has been making contributions to *M*. *Z* experiences financial difficulties and stops making contributions to *M* but continues to employ all of the employees covered by the collective bargaining agreement. *Z*'s cessation of contributions to *M* causes those employees (and their spouses and dependent children) to lose coverage under *M*. *Z* does not make group health plan coverage available to any of the employees covered by the collective bargaining agreement.

(ii) After *Z* stops contributing to *M*, *M* continues to have the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to any qualified beneficiary who experienced a qualifying event that preceded or coincided with the cessation of contributions to *M* and whose coverage under *M* on the day before the qualifying event was due to an employment affiliation with *Z*. The loss of coverage under *M* for those employees of *Z* who continue in employment (and the loss of coverage for their spouses and dependent children) does not constitute a qualifying event.

Example 2. (i) The facts are the same as in *Example 1* except that *B*, one of the employees covered under *M* before *Z* stops contributing to *M*, is transferred into management. *Z* maintains a group health plan for managers and *B* becomes eligible for coverage under the plan on the day of *B*'s transfer.

(ii) Under these facts, *Z* does not make group health plan coverage available to a class of employees formerly covered under *M* after *B* becomes eligible under *Z*'s group health plan for managers. Accordingly, *M* continues to have the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to any qualified beneficiary who experienced a qualifying event that preceded or coincided with the cessation of contributions to *M* and whose coverage under *M* on the day before the qualifying event was due to an employment affiliation with *Z*.

Example 3. (i) Employer *Y* employs two classes of employees—skilled and unskilled laborers—covered by a collective bargaining agreement and participating in multiemployer group health plan *M*. As required by the collective bargaining agreement, *Y* has been making contributions to *M*. *Y* stops making contributions to *M* but continues to employ all the employees covered by the col-

lective bargaining agreement. *Y*'s cessation of contributions to *M* causes those employees (and their spouses and dependent children) to lose coverage under *M*. *Y* makes group health plan coverage available to the skilled laborers immediately after their coverage ceases under *M*, but *Y* does not make group health plan coverage available to any of the unskilled laborers.

(ii) Under these facts, because *Y* makes group health plan coverage available to a class of employees previously covered under *M* immediately after both classes of employees lose coverage under *M*, *Y* alone has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to any qualified beneficiary who experienced a qualifying event that preceded or coincided with the cessation of contributions to *M* and whose coverage under *M* on the day before the qualifying event was due to an employment affiliation with *Y*, regardless of whether the employment affiliation was as a skilled or unskilled laborer. However, the loss of coverage under *M* for those employees of *Y* who continue in employment (and the loss of coverage for their spouses and dependent children) does not constitute a qualifying event.

Example 4. (i) Employer *X* employs a class of employees covered by a collective bargaining agreement and participating in multiemployer group health plan *M*. As required by the collective bargaining agreement, *X* has been making contributions to *M*. *X* experiences financial difficulties and is forced into bankruptcy by its creditors. *X* continues to employ all of the employees covered by the collective bargaining agreement. *X* also continues to make contributions to *M* until the current collective bargaining agreement expires, on June 30, 2001, and then *X* stops making contributions to *M*. *X*'s employees (and their spouses and dependent children) lose coverage under *M* effective July 1, 2001. *X* does not enter into another collective bargaining agreement covering the class of employees covered by the expired collective bargaining agreement. Effective September 1, 2001, *X* establishes a group health plan covering the class of employees formerly covered by the collective bargaining agreement. The group health plan also covers their spouses and dependent children.

(ii) Under these facts, *M* has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available from July 1, 2001 until August 31, 2001, and the group health plan established by *X* has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available from September 1, 2001 until the obligation ends (see Q&A-1 of § 54.4980B-7) to any qualified beneficiary who experienced a qualifying event that preceded or coincided with the cessation of contributions to *M* and whose coverage under *M* on the day before the qualifying event was due to an employment affiliation with *X*.

The loss of coverage under *M* for those employees of *X* who continue in employment (and the loss of coverage for their spouses and dependent children) does not constitute a qualifying event.

Example 5. (i) Employer *W* employs a class of employees covered by a collective bargaining agreement and participating in multiemployer group health plan *M*. As required by the collective bargaining agreement, *W* has been making contributions to *M*. The employees covered by the collective bargaining agreement vote to decertify their current employee representative effective January 1, 2002 and vote to certify a new employee representative effective the same date. As a consequence, on January 1, 2002 they cease to be covered under *M* and commence to be covered under multiemployer group health plan *N*.

(ii) Effective January 1, 2002, *N* has the obligation to make COBRA continuation coverage available to any qualified beneficiary who experienced a qualifying event that preceded or coincided with the cessation of contributions to *M* and whose coverage under *M* on the day before the qualifying event was due to an employment affiliation with *W*. The loss of coverage under *M* for those employees of *W* who continue in employment (and the loss of coverage for their spouses and dependent children) does not constitute a qualifying event.

[T.D. 8928, 66 FR 1855, Jan. 10, 2001]

§ 54.4980B-10 Interaction of FMLA and COBRA.

The following questions-and-answers address how the taking of leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) (29 U.S.C. 2601-2619) affects the COBRA continuation coverage requirements:

Q-1: In what circumstances does a qualifying event occur if an employee does not return from leave taken under FMLA?

A-1: (a) The taking of leave under FMLA does not constitute a qualifying event. A qualifying event under Q&A-1 of § 54.4980B-4 occurs, however, if—

(1) An employee (or the spouse or a dependent child of the employee) is covered on the day before the first day of FMLA leave (or becomes covered during the FMLA leave) under a group health plan of the employee's employer;

(2) The employee does not return to employment with the employer at the end of the FMLA leave; and

(3) The employee (or the spouse or a dependent child of the employee)

would, in the absence of COBRA continuation coverage, lose coverage under the group health plan before the end of the maximum coverage period.

(b) However, the satisfaction of the three conditions in paragraph (a) of this Q&A-1 does not constitute a qualifying event if the employer eliminates, on or before the last day of the employee's FMLA leave, coverage under a group health plan for the class of employees (while continuing to employ that class of employees) to which the employee would have belonged if the employee had not taken FMLA leave.

Q-2: If a qualifying event described in Q&A-1 of this section occurs, when does it occur, and how is the maximum coverage period measured?

A-2: A qualifying event described in Q&A-1 of this section occurs on the last day of FMLA leave. (The determination of when FMLA leave ends is not made under the rules of this section. See the FMLA regulations, 29 CFR Part 825 (§§ 825.100-825.800).) The maximum coverage period (see Q&A-4 of § 54.4980B-7) is measured from the date of the qualifying event (that is, the last day of FMLA leave). If, however, coverage under the group health plan is lost at a later date and the plan provides for the extension of the required periods (see paragraph (b) of Q&A-4 of § 54.4980B-7), then the maximum coverage period is measured from the date when coverage is lost. The rules of this Q&A-2 are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Employee *B* is covered under the group health plan of Employer *X* on January 31, 2001. *B* takes FMLA leave beginning February 1, 2001. *B*'s last day of FMLA leave is 12 weeks later, on April 25, 2001, and *B* does not return to work with *X* at the end of the FMLA leave. If *B* does not elect COBRA continuation coverage, *B* will not be covered under the group health plan of *X* as of April 26, 2001.

(ii) *B* experiences a qualifying event on April 25, 2001, and the maximum coverage period is measured from that date. (This is the case even if, for part or all of the FMLA leave, *B* fails to pay the employee portion of premiums for coverage under the group health plan of *X* and is not covered under *X*'s plan. See Q&A-3 of this section.)

Example 2. (i) Employee *C* and *C*'s spouse are covered under the group health plan of Employer *Y* on August 15, 2001. *C* takes