

PENSION BENEFIT GUARANTY CORPORATION**29 CFR Part 4044****Allocation of Assets in Single-Employer Plans; Interest Assumptions for Valuing Benefits**

AGENCY: Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: The Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation's regulation on Allocation of Assets in Single-Employer Plans prescribes interest assumptions for valuing benefits under terminating single-employer plans. This final rule amends the regulation to adopt interest assumptions for plans with valuation dates in January 1998.

EFFECTIVE DATE: January 1, 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Harold J. Ashner, Assistant General Counsel, Office of the General Counsel, Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, 1200 K Street, NW., Washington, DC 20005, 202-326-4024. (For TTY and TDD, call 800-877-8339 and request connection to 202-326-4024).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The PBGC's regulation on Allocation of Assets in Single-Employer Plans (29 CFR part 4044) prescribes actuarial assumptions for valuing plan benefits of terminating single-employer plans covered by title IV of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974.

Among the actuarial assumptions prescribed in part 4044 are interest assumptions. These interest

assumptions are intended to reflect current conditions in the financial and annuity markets.

Two sets of interest assumptions are prescribed, one set for the valuation of benefits to be paid as annuities and one set for the valuation of benefits to be paid as lump sums. This amendment adds to appendix B to part 4044 the annuity and lump sum interest assumptions for valuing benefits in plans with valuation dates during January 1998.

For annuity benefits, the interest assumptions will be 5.60 percent for the first 25 years following the valuation date and 5.25 percent thereafter. The annuity interest assumptions represent (in comparison with those in effect for December 1997) no change for the first 25 years following the valuation date and an increase of 0.25 percent for all years thereafter. For benefits to be paid as lump sums, the interest assumptions to be used by the PBGC will be 4.25 percent for the period during which a benefit is in pay status and 4.00 percent during any years preceding the benefit's placement in pay status. The lump sum interest assumptions represent (in comparison with those in effect for December 1997) a decrease of .25 percent for the period during which a benefit is in pay status and no change for the period preceding the benefit's placement in pay status.

The PBGC has determined that notice and public comment on this amendment are impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This finding is based on the need to determine and issue new interest assumptions promptly so that

the assumptions can reflect, as accurately as possible, current market conditions.

Because of the need to provide immediate guidance for the valuation of benefits in plans with valuation dates during January 1998, the PBGC finds that good cause exists for making the assumptions set forth in this amendment effective less than 30 days after publication.

The PBGC has determined that this action is not a "significant regulatory action" under the criteria set forth in Executive Order 12866.

Because no general notice of proposed rulemaking is required for this amendment, the Regulatory Flexibility Act of 1980 does not apply. See 5 U.S.C. 601(2).

List of Subjects in 29 CFR Part 4044

Pension insurance, Pensions.

In consideration of the foregoing, 29 CFR part 4044 is amended as follows:

PART 4044—ALLOCATION OF ASSETS IN SINGLE-EMPLOYER PLANS

1. The authority citation for part 4044 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 29 U.S.C. 1301(a), 1302(b)(3), 1341, 1344, 1362.

2. In appendix B, a new entry is added to Table I, and Rate Set 51 is added to Table II, as set forth below. The introductory text of each table is republished for the convenience of the reader and remains unchanged.

APPENDIX B TO PART 4044—INTEREST RATES USED TO VALUE ANNUITIES AND LUMP SUMS

TABLE I.—ANNUITY VALUATIONS

[This table sets forth, for each indicated calendar month, the interest rates (denoted by i_1 , i_2 , * * *, and referred to generally as i_t) assumed to be in effect between specified anniversaries of a valuation date that occurs within that calendar month; those anniversaries are specified in the columns adjacent to the rates. The last listed rate is assumed to be in effect after the last listed anniversary date.]

For valuation dates occurring in the month—	The values of i_t are:					
	i_t	for t =	i_t	for t =	i_t	for t =
* * *	*	*	*	*	*	*
January 19980560	1–25	.0525	>25	N/A	N/A

TABLE II.—LUMP SUM VALUATIONS

[In using this table: (1) For benefits for which the participant or beneficiary is entitled to be in pay status on the valuation date, the immediate annuity rate shall apply; (2) For benefits for which the deferral period is y years (where y is an integer and $0 < y \leq n_1$), interest rate i_1 shall apply from the valuation date for a period of y years, and thereafter the immediate annuity rate shall apply; (3) For benefits for which the deferral period is y years (where y is an integer and $n_1 < y \leq n_1 + n_2$), interest rate i_2 shall apply from the valuation date for a period of $y - n_1$ years, interest rate i_1 shall apply for the following n_1 years, and thereafter the immediate annuity rate shall apply; (4) For benefits for which the deferral period is y years (where y is an integer and $y > n_1 + n_2$), interest rate i_3 shall apply from the valuation date for a period of $y - n_1 - n_2$ years, interest rate i_2 shall apply for the following n_2 years, interest rate i_1 shall apply for the following n_1 years, and thereafter the immediate annuity rate shall apply.]

Rate set	For plans with a valuation date		Immediate annuity rate (percent)	Deferred annuities (percent)				
	On or after	Before		i_1	i_2	i_3	n_1	n_2
* 51	* 01-1-98	02-1-98	* 4.25	* 4.00	* 4.00	4.00	* 7	* 8

Issued in Washington, D.C., on this 10th day of December 1997.

David M. Strauss,

Executive Director, Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation.

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PENSION BENEFIT GUARANTY CORPORATION

29 CFR Part 4044

Allocation of Assets in Single-Employer Plans; Valuation of Benefits and Assets; Expected Retirement Age

AGENCY: Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: This rule amends the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation's regulation on Allocation of Assets in Single-Employer Plans by substituting new Table I-98 in place of existing Table I-97 in appendix D. Table I-98 applies to any plan being terminated either in a distress termination or involuntarily by the PBGC with a valuation date falling in 1998, and is used to determine expected retirement ages for plan participants. This table is needed in order to compute the value of early retirement benefits and, thus, the total value of benefits under the plan.

EFFECTIVE DATE: January 1, 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Harold J. Ashner, Assistant General Counsel, Office of the General Counsel, Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, 1200 K Street, NW., Washington, DC 20005-4026; 202-326-4024 (202-326-4179 for TTY and TDD).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The PBGC's regulation on Allocation of Assets in Single-Employer Plans (29 CFR part 4044) sets forth (in subpart B) the methods for valuing plan benefits of terminating single-employer plans

covered under Title IV of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974. Under ERISA section 4041(c), plans wishing to terminate in a distress termination must value guaranteed benefits and benefit liabilities under the plan in accordance with part 4044, subpart B. In addition, when the PBGC terminates an underfunded plan involuntarily pursuant to ERISA Section 4042(a), it uses the subpart B valuation rules to determine the amount of the plan's underfunding.

Under § 4044.51(b), early retirement benefits are valued based on the annuity starting date, if a retirement date has been selected, or the expected retirement age, if the annuity starting date is not known on the valuation date. Sections 4044.55 through 4044.57 set forth rules for determining the expected retirement ages for plan participants entitled to early retirement benefits. Appendix D of part 4044 contains tables to be used in determining the expected early retirement ages.

Table I in appendix D (Selection of Retirement Rate Category) is used to determine whether a participant has a low, medium, or high probability of retiring early. The determination is based on the year a participant would reach "unreduced retirement age" (i.e., the earlier of the normal retirement age or the age at which an unreduced benefit is first payable) and the participant's monthly benefit at unreduced retirement age. The table applies only to plans with valuation dates in the current year and is updated annually by the PBGC to reflect changes in the cost of living, etc.

(The PBGC's general practice has been to issue annual update amendments on or about December 15 of each year, at the same time it issues interest updates for other regulations. However, the information needed to update the expected retirement age table is typically available earlier than the

information for the interest updates. The PBGC intends in the future to publish annual updates of the expected retirement age table earlier than December 15.)

Tables II-A, II-B, and II-C (Expected Retirement Ages for Individuals in the Low, Medium, and High Categories respectively) are used to determine the expected retirement age after the probability of early retirement has been determined using Table I. These tables establish, by probability category, the expected retirement age based on both the earliest age a participant could retire under the plan and the unreduced retirement age. This expected retirement age is used to compute the value of the early retirement benefit and, thus, the total value of benefits under the plan.

This document amends appendix D to replace Table I-97 with Table I-98 in order to provide an updated correlation, appropriate for calendar year 1998, between the amount of a participant's benefit and the probability that the participant will elect early retirement. Table I-98 will be used to value benefits in plans with valuation dates during calendar year 1998.

The PBGC has determined that notice of and public comment on this rule are impracticable and contrary to the public interest. Plan administrators need to be able to estimate accurately the value of plan benefits as early as possible before initiating the termination process. For that purpose, if a plan has a valuation date in 1998, the plan administrator needs the updated table being promulgated in this rule. Accordingly, the public interest is best served by issuing this table expeditiously, without an opportunity for notice and comment, to allow as much time as possible to estimate the value of plan benefits with the proper table for plans with valuation dates in early 1998. Moreover, because of the need to provide immediate guidance for the valuation of benefits