

§ 962.16 Disqualification of reviewing official or presiding official.

If a Respondent believes, in good faith, that the Reviewing Official or Presiding Officer should be disqualified because of personal bias, or other reason, the Respondent may file a timely and sufficient affidavit alleging such belief with supporting evidence. If the Presiding Officer finds that such allegations concerning the Reviewing Official are meritorious, he may direct the Reviewing Official to disqualify himself and request the appointment of a new Reviewing Official. Where a Respondent seeks the disqualification of a Presiding Officer, such Presiding Officer, may, in his discretion, disqualify himself at any time during the proceeding. In the event a Reviewing Official or Presiding Officer withdraws from a hearing, the proceeding shall be stayed until the assignment of a new Reviewing Official or Presiding Officer.

§ 962.17 Ex parte communications.

Communications between a Presiding Officer and a party shall not be made on any matter in issue unless on notice and opportunity for all parties to participate. This prohibition does not apply to procedural matters. A memorandum of any communication between the Presiding Officer and a party shall be transmitted by the Presiding Officer to all parties.

§ 962.18 Post-hearing briefs.

Post-hearing briefs and reply briefs may be submitted upon such terms as established by the Presiding Officer at the conclusion of the hearing.

§ 962.19 Transcript of proceedings.

Testimony and argument at hearings shall be reported verbatim, unless the Presiding Officer orders otherwise. Transcripts or copies of the proceedings may be obtained by the parties at such rates as may be fixed by contract between the reporter and the Postal Service.

§ 962.20 Initial decision.

(a) After the conclusion of the hearing, and the receipt of briefs, if any, from the parties, the Presiding Officer shall issue a written initial decision,

including his or her findings and determinations. Such decision shall include the findings of fact and conclusions of law which the Presiding Officer relied upon in determining whether the Respondent is liable under 31 U.S.C. 3802, and, if liability is found, shall set forth the amount of any penalties and assessments imposed.

(b) The Presiding Officer shall promptly send to each party a copy of his or her initial decision, and a statement describing the right of any person determined to be liable under 31 U.S.C. 3802, to appeal, in accordance with § 962.21, the decision of the Presiding Officer to the Judicial Officer.

(c) Unless the Respondent appeals the Presiding Officer's initial decision, such decision, including the findings and determinations, is final.

§ 962.21 Appeal of initial decision to judicial officer.

(a) *Notice of appeal and supporting brief.* (1) A Respondent may appeal an adverse initial decision by filing, within 30 days after the Presiding Officer issues an initial decision, a Notice of Appeal with the Recorder. The Judicial Officer may extend the filing period if the Respondent files a request for an extension within the initial 30-day period and demonstrates good cause for such extension.

(2) The Respondent's Notice of Appeal must be accompanied by a written brief specifying the Respondent's exceptions, and any reasons for such exceptions, to the Presiding Officer's initial decision.

(3) Within 30 days of receiving the Respondent's brief, the Reviewing Official may file with the Judicial Officer a response to the Respondent's specified exceptions to the Presiding Officer's initial decision.

(b) *Form of review.* (1) Review by the Judicial Officer will be based entirely on the record and written submissions.

(2) The Judicial Officer may affirm, reduce, reverse, or remand any penalty or assessment determined by the Presiding Officer.

(3) The Judicial Officer shall not consider any objection that was not raised in the hearing unless the interested party demonstrates that the failure to raise the objection before the Presiding

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Officer was caused by extraordinary circumstances.

(4) If any party demonstrates to the satisfaction of the Judicial Officer that additional evidence not presented at the hearing is material and that there were reasonable grounds for the failure to present such evidence, the Judicial Officer shall remand the matter to the Presiding Officer for consideration of such additional evidence.

(c) *Decision of judicial officer.* (1) The Judicial Officer shall promptly serve each party to the appeal with a copy of his decision and a statement describing the right to judicial review under 31 U.S.C. 3805 of any Respondent determined to be liable under 31 U.S.C. 3802.

(2) The decision of the Judicial Officer constitutes final agency action and becomes final and binding on the parties 60 days after it is issued unless a petition for judicial review is filed.

[52 FR 12904, Apr. 20, 1987, as amended at 67 FR 62179, Oct. 4, 2002]

§ 962.22 Form and filing of documents.

(a) Every pleading filed in a proceeding under this part must

(1) Contain a caption setting forth the title of the action, the docket number (after assignment by the Recorder), and a designation of the document (e.g., "Motion to Quash Subpoena");

(2) Contain the name, address, and telephone number of the party or other person on whose behalf the paper was filed, or the name, address and telephone number of the representative who prepared such paper; and

(3) Be signed by the party or other person submitting the document, or by such party's or person's representative.

(b) The original and three copies of all pleadings and documents in a proceeding conducted under this part shall be filed with the Recorder, Judicial Officer Department, United States Postal Service, 2101 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 600, Arlington, VA 22201-3078. Normal Recorder business hours are between 8:15 a.m. and 4:45 p.m., eastern standard or daylight saving time. The Recorder will transmit a copy of each document filed to the other party, and the original to the Presiding Officer.

(c) Pleadings or document transmittals to, or communications with, the Postal Service, other than to the Re-

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order under paragraph (b) of this section, shall be made through the Reviewing Official or designated Postal Service attorney. If a notice of appearance by a representative is filed on behalf of a Respondent, pleadings or document transmittals to, or communications with, the Respondent shall be made through his representative.

[52 FR 12904, Apr. 20, 1987, as amended at 63 FR 66053, Dec. 1, 1998]

§ 962.23 Service of notice of hearing, other documents.

Unless otherwise specified, service of a Notice of Hearing or any other document under this part must be effected by registered or certified mail, return-receipt requested, or by personal delivery. In the case of personal service, the person making service shall, if possible, secure from the party or other person sought to be served, or his or her agent, a written acknowledgement of receipt, showing the date and time of such receipt. If the person upon whom service is made declines to acknowledge receipt, the person effecting service shall execute a statement, indicating the time, place and manner of service, which shall constitute evidence of service.

§ 962.24 Computation of time.

(a) In computing any period of time provided for by this part, or any order issued pursuant to this part, the time begins with the day following the act, event, or default, and includes the last day of the period, unless it is a Saturday, Sunday, or legal holiday observed by the Federal Government, in which event it includes the next business day.

(b) When the applicable period of time is less than seven days, intermediate Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays observed by the Federal Government shall be excluded from the computation.

§ 962.25 Continuances and extensions.

Continuances and extensions may be granted under these rules for good cause shown.

§ 962.26 Settlement.

(a) Either party may make offers of settlement or proposals of adjustment at any time.