DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

38 CFR Part 36
RIN 2900–AN78

Loan Guaranty Revised Loan Modification Procedures

AGENCY: Department of Veterans Affairs.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: This document amends a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Loan Guaranty regulation related to modification of guaranteed housing loans in default. Specifically, changes are made to requirements related to maximum interest rates on modified loans and to items that may be capitalized in a modified loan amount. In addition, we are revising the regulation to clarify that the holder of a loan may seek VA approval for a loan modification that does not otherwise meet prescribed conditions. The amendments are intended to liberalize the requirements for modification of VA-guaranteed loans and provide holders more options for working with veterans to avoid foreclosure.

DATES: This final rule is effective January 19, 2012.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:
Mike Frueh, Assistant Director for Loan Management (261), Veterans Benefits Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Avenue NW., Washington, DC 20420, at (571) 272–0017. (This is not a toll-free telephone number.)

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Statutory Background

Under 38 U.S.C. chapter 37, VA guarantees loans made by private lenders to veterans for the purchase, construction, and refinancing of homes owned and occupied by veterans.

Regulatory Background

On February 1, 2008, VA published in the Federal Register (73 FR 6294) a final rule that extensively revised 38 CFR part 36 to modernize procedures for servicing VA-guaranteed home loans. A new subpart F was added to include §36.4815, which provided detailed parameters for private loan servicers to modify delinquent loans without seeking prior approval from VA, thereby enabling servicers to quickly assist veteran borrowers in avoiding foreclosure. On June 15, 2010, VA published in the Federal Register (75 FR 33704) a final rule that redesignated subpart F (the 36.4800 series) to replace obsolete subpart B (the 36.4300 series) in its entirety. On February 7, 2011, VA published in the Federal Register (76 FR 6555) an interim final rule that (1) restructured §36.4315 to clarify that holders may seek VA approval for a loan modification if the proposed modification does not otherwise meet the conditions prescribed in §36.4315(a), (2) revised the methodology for determining the maximum interest rate on a modified loan, and (3) allowed foreclosure costs actually incurred to be capitalized into the modified loan balance.

The public comment period on the interim final rule closed on April 8, 2011. VA received comments from six entities about the rule. One comment was from a mortgage industry trade association, three were from mortgage servicers, and two were from nonprofit law firms writing on behalf of veteran borrowers. The final rule has been revised to incorporate changes that VA agrees are necessary in light of, or as the logical outgrowth of the comments provided. The following paragraphs discuss the comments VA received on the interim final rule. The comments are presented in order by the paragraph to which the comments apply, and similar comments are grouped together.

Section 36.4315(a)(8) Interest Rate Restrictions

Comment: VA should change the establishment of the maximum interest rate from the date the modification is executed to the date the modification is approved.

VA Response: VA concurs. As indicated in the interim final rule, VA based its revision to the establishment of the maximum interest rate allowable on a loan modification to a large extent on a Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Mortgagee Letter (2009–35), which stated that the maximum rate would be computed as of the date of execution of the Modification Agreement. However, several comments mentioned that a subsequent Loan Modification Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document posted by HUD on its Web site (at http://www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/sfh/mortgagee_qlm.cfm) stated that the maximum interest rate on a loan modification should actually be calculated as of the date the Mortgagee approves the modification. This is a more beneficial position for a veteran borrower, as it allows the maximum rate to be calculated when the servicer is underwriting the modification, without the possibility of an interest rate increase occurring before execution of the modification that might result in an increase in the interest rate. In addition, it is more feasible from a processing standpoint for the servicer, because it allows the rate to be fixed without concern that documents may be sent to the borrower to be signed, but the Modification Agreement may be in violation of the regulation if rates decrease before the modification is executed. Therefore, §36.4315(a)(8)(i) is changed by replacing the word “executed” with the word “approved”.

Comment: VA should require that the interest rate on a modified loan be lower than the existing rate, or that any interest rate increase on a modified loan be submitted to VA for approval.

VA Response: VA does not concur. As discussed in the preamble to the interim final rule, a modification typically allows capitalization of past due amounts over a very long repayment term, sometimes as long as 10 years past the original maturity date of the loan (or even longer if the original term was less than 30 years), which may be necessary in order to make the modification even more affordable. Requiring VA to review every case with a small interest rate increase would place an undue burden on limited staff, while providing no tangible benefit to veterans. Allowing modification at a market interest rate, which may be lower or higher than the existing interest rate, serves as an incentive for the servicer to complete the modification at a rate that will allow it to re-pool the modified loan without taking a loss to do so. However, if the proposed interest rate for the modification is more than one percent above the existing rate, then VA believes it is appropriate to review the case to determine if the increased rate, in addition to the capitalization of the delinquency, could raise serious questions about the veteran’s ability to repay the modified loan. That would give VA the opportunity to consider refunding the loan at a lower rate in order to make the modification even more affordable for the veteran borrower. If the servicer decides that a veteran is not a reasonable credit risk for a loan modification, then VA has the opportunity through its oversight to consider refunding the loan at a rate that
will make the loan affordable, if that is possible. This is the position that VA believes best balances the goals of the VA home loan program to provide a benefit to our nation’s veterans, while also exercising appropriate judgment in the use of taxpayer funds to acquire loans that will yield much lower than market rates.

Comment: VA should mandate lower payments on a modified loan. For circumstances in which: (1) The interest rate will be the same or higher, or (2) even a reduced interest rate will not result in a lower payment, or (3) the interest rate cannot be reduced (such as on a loan held by a state housing-finance authority), VA should require reduction in the principal balance so that the payment will be reduced.

VA Response: VA does not concur. As stated above, the purpose of a loan modification is to give a borrower a fresh start by resetting the terms of the loan to make payments affordable. Reducing a loan payment does not necessarily guarantee that future payments will be affordable for a borrower, as that requires an analysis of income and other expenses. If a borrower can afford future payments that are slightly higher than existing payments, but cannot afford to pay the accrued delinquency, then there is no need to require that payments on a modified loan be lower than the existing payments, only that the delinquency be eliminated via the modification. As far as requiring that a servicer waive a portion of the principal balance in order to reduce payments, VA does not have any specific authority to do so. VA does have the option to assist a veteran borrower in need of lower payments by refunding a loan and reducing the interest rate well below the market rate to make payments affordable. However, that authority to refund must be balanced against the fact that taxpayer funds will be used to acquire a loan that will be modified to yield much less than market interest rates.

Section 36.4315(a)(10) Fees Allowed in Modified Amount

Comment: VA should mandate lower payments on a modified loan. For circumstances in which: (1) The interest rate will be the same or higher, or (2) even a reduced interest rate will not result in a lower payment, or (3) the interest rate cannot be reduced (such as on a loan held by a state housing-finance authority), VA should require reduction in the principal balance so that the payment will be reduced.

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thereof; or (4) Raise novel legal or policy issues arising out of legal mandates, the President’s priorities, or the principles set forth in this Executive Order.’’

The economic, interagency, budgetary, legal, and policy implications of this regulatory action have been examined and it has been determined not to be a significant regulatory action under Executive Order 12866.

Regulatory Flexibility Act

The Secretary hereby certifies that this final rule would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities as they are defined in the Regulatory Flexibility Act, 5 U.S.C. 601–612. The vast majority of VA loans are serviced by very large financial companies. Only a handful of small entities service VA loans and they service only a very small number of loans. This final rule, which only impacts veterans, other individual obligors with guaranteed loans, and companies that service VA loans, will have very minor economic impact on a very small number of small entities servicing such loans. Therefore, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 605(b), this rule is exempt from the initial and final regulatory flexibility analysis requirements of sections 603 and 604.

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance

The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance number and title for the program affected by this document is 64.114, Veterans Housing—Guaranteed and Insured Loans.

Signing Authority

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, or designee, approved this document and authorized the undersigned to sign and submit the document to the Office of the Federal Register for publication electronically as an official document of the Department of Veterans Affairs. John R. Gingrich, Chief of Staff, Department of Veterans Affairs, approved this document on October 24, 2011, for publication.

List of Subjects in 38 CFR Part 36

Condominiums, Handicapped, Housing, Indians, Individuals with disabilities, Loan programs—housing and community development, Loan programs—Indians, Loan programs—veterans, Manufactured homes, Mortgage insurance, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements, Veterans.

Dated: December 15, 2011.

Robert C. McFetridge,
Director of Regulation Policy and Management, Office of the General Counsel, Department of Veterans Affairs.

For the reasons stated in the preamble, VA amends 38 CFR part 36 as follows:

PART 36—LOAN GUARANTY

1. The authority citation for part 36 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 38 U.S.C. 501 and as otherwise noted.

2. Amend § 36.4315 by:

a. In paragraph (a)(8)(i) removing “executed” and adding, in its place, “approved”.

b. In paragraph (a)(10) removing “canceled foreclosure;” and adding, in its place, “canceled foreclosure; (subject to the maximum amounts prescribed in § 36.4314)”.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

40 CFR Part 52


Revisions to the California State Implementation Plan, South Coast Air Quality Management District

AGENCY: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

ACTION: Direct final rule.

SUMMARY: EPA is taking direct final action to approve a revision to the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) portion of the California State Implementation Plan (SIP). This revision concerns oxides of nitrogen (NOx) and oxides of sulfur (SOx) emissions from facilities emitting 4 tons or more per year of NOx or SOx in the year 1990 or any subsequent year under the SCAQMD’s Regional Clean Air Incentives Market (RECLAIM) program. We are approving a local rule that regulates these emission sources under the Clean Air Act as amended in 1990 (CAA or the Act).

DATES: This rule is effective on February 21, 2012 without further notice, unless EPA receives adverse comments by January 19, 2012. If we receive such comments, we will publish a timely withdrawal in the Federal Register to notify the public that this direct final rule will not take effect.

ADDRESSES: Submit comments, identified by docket number EPA–R09–OAR–2011–0897, by one of the following methods:


2. Email: steckel.andrew@epa.gov.

3. Mail or deliver: Andrew Steckel (Air-4), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region IX, 75 Hawthorne Street, San Francisco, CA 94105–3901.

Instructions: All comments will be included in the public docket without change and may be available online at www.regulations.gov, including any personal information provided, unless the comment includes Confidential Business Information (CBI) or other information whose disclosure is restricted by statute. Information that you consider CBI or otherwise protected should be clearly identified as such and should not be submitted through www.regulations.gov or email. www.regulations.gov is an “anonymous access” system, and EPA will not know your identity or contact information unless you provide it in the body of your comment. If you send email directly to EPA, your email address will be automatically captured and included as part of the public comment. If EPA cannot read your comment due to technical difficulties and cannot contact you for clarification, EPA may not be able to consider your comment. Electronic files should avoid the use of special characters, any form of encryption, and be free of any defects or viruses.

Docket: Generally, documents in the docket for this action are available electronically at www.regulations.gov and in hard copy at EPA Region IX, 75 Hawthorne Street, San Francisco, California. While all documents in the docket are listed at www.regulations.gov, some information may be publicly available only at the hard copy location (e.g., copyrighted material, large maps), and some may not be publicly available in either location (e.g., CBI). To inspect the hard copy materials, please schedule an appointment during normal business hours with the contact listed in the FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT section.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Lily Wong, EPA Region IX, (415) 947–4114, wong.lily@epa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Throughout this document, “we,” “us,” and “our” refer to EPA.

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