



DON'T BE FOOLED BY...

THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF THE FEDERAL REGISTER

Imagine you own a manufacturing business and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has just implemented new regulations regarding how many pollutants factories can emit. Or maybe you are concerned about health issues and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has new guidelines for what counts as organically grown produce. Or maybe you work for Planned Parenthood and the U.S. president has just signed an executive order designed to limit the number of abortions. The media may cover a few of these policies, but in many cases the actions of government are so numerous, specific, and dull that they never receive any press coverage. Where do you go to find out how the government's actions affect your business or your life?

Fortunately, the *Federal Register* publishes all the information you will ever need about government policies, including all executive agency rules and notices (for example, from the Department of Agriculture or the EPA) as well as presidential documents, such as executive orders.

The *Federal Register* covers an enormously complex system of rules and regulations, organized into four sections:

- Presidential documents include all executive orders (see Chapter 8 for more on executive orders) or proclamations signed that day by the president. For example, a president may issue a proclamation honoring a historical person, such as Martin Luther King Jr., or observing a special event, such as the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II.
- Proposed rules are published to allow for public comment before a new rule is implemented. If citizens or interest groups are upset with, say, the FDA's proposed pesticides rule, they have the chance to make their voices heard.
- Rules and regulations are published after the time for comments expires. Once the rule is published, it amends the Code of Federal Regulation (CFR). The CFR is simply a listing of all federal regulations and is updated four times a year.
- Notices describe official actions and functions that provide important information but do not amend the CFR. For example, meetings of certain government

groups are posted or federal grant opportunities are announced.

Be forewarned, the *Federal Register* is not the easiest or most compelling reading you will ever do. The language can often be difficult to comprehend largely because the subject matter is usually quite complex. But when government decisions touch your life and affect your ability to make a living, it is essential that you know what you are up against.

How to Navigate the *Federal Register*

1. **Access the Internet.** The wonderful thing about the Internet is that citizens have access to enormous amounts of information quickly. Instead of having to wait about a week for a university library to receive the *Federal Register*, as was once the case, you can simply go to the U.S. Government Printing Office web site (www.gpo.gov/fdsys/), click on "Federal Register," and immediately get a copy from any date between 1994 and the present. (To obtain older versions, you must go to a federal depository or academic library, whose records might be incomplete.)
2. **Perform a keyword search or browse.** Once online, you may then perform a search by keyword, agency, date, or section (for example, "Notices" or "Proposed rules"). If you want to browse a particular day of the *Federal Register*, the table of contents lists all documents by agency name in alphabetical order and is then arranged by section. The table of contents also presents a brief description of each document's subject matter. At the back of each issue of the *Federal Register*, you will find a reader aid that, among other things, reminds you about rules going into effect that day, lists recently enacted public laws, and gives customer service information.
3. **Examine the heading.** Each section of the *Federal Register* has a standard format to make it easier for readers to follow and obtain the information they need. The heading lists the agency name (and subagency if one exists), the parts of the CFR that will or would be affected (this is not included for notices or presidential documents), and the subject matter.
4. **Read the entry.** If after reading the heading you decide that you want more information on the proposed rule, enacted regulation, or notice, you can read the different sections of the entry. Next to "AGENCY" you will find the name of the agency proposing or implementing the rule, announcing a meeting, or the like. Next to "ACTION" you will see the section under which the entry falls (for example, "Final rule; Treasury decision"). The "SUMMARY" provides a brief explanation of the issues involved and the rulemaking objectives; in other words, what the agency did and why. The "DATES" section lists the date of a meeting, hearing, comment deadline, or when a regulation will go into effect. You will also see contact information, including the name, address, phone number, and email address of a knowledgeable person involved in the rule or notice. Finally, under "SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION" you will find