

§ 1.401(k)-3 Safe harbor requirements.

(a) *ADP test safe harbor* —(1) *Section 401(k)(12) safe harbor*. A cash or deferred arrangement satisfies the ADP safe harbor provision of section 401(k)(12) for a plan year if the arrangement satisfies the safe harbor contribution requirement of paragraph (b) or (c) of this section for the plan year, the notice requirement of paragraph (d) of this section, the plan year requirements of paragraph (e) of this section, and the additional rules of paragraphs (f), (g), and (h) of this section, as applicable.

(2) *Section 401(k)(13) safe harbor*. For plan years beginning on or after January 1, 2008, a cash or deferred arrangement satisfies the ADP safe harbor provision of section 401(k)(13) for a plan year if the arrangement is described in paragraph (j) of this section and satisfies the safe harbor contribution requirement of paragraph (k) of this section for the plan year, the notice requirement of paragraph (d) of this section (modified to include the information set forth in paragraph (k)(4) of this section), the plan year requirements of paragraph (e) of this section, and the additional rules of paragraphs (f), (g), and (h) of this section, as applicable. A cash or deferred arrangement that satisfies the requirements of this paragraph (a)(2) is referred to as a qualified automatic contribution arrangement.

(3) *Requirements applicable to safe harbor contributions*. Pursuant to section 401(k)(12)(E)(ii) and section 401(k)(13)(D)(iv), the safe harbor contribution requirement of paragraph (b), (c), or (k) of this section must be satisfied without regard to section 401(l). The contributions made under paragraph (b) or (c) of this section (and the corresponding contributions under paragraph (k) of this section) are referred to as safe harbor nonelective contributions and safe harbor matching contributions.

(b) *Safe harbor nonelective contribution requirement* —(1) *General rule*. The safe harbor nonelective contribution requirement of this paragraph is satisfied if, under the terms of the plan, the employer is required to make a qualified nonelective contribution on behalf of each eligible NHCE equal to at least 3% of the employee's safe harbor compensation.

(2) *Safe harbor compensation defined*. For purposes of this section, safe harbor compensation means compensation as defined in §1.401(k)-6 (which incorporates the definition of compensation in §1.414(s)-1); provided, however, that the rule in the last sentence of §1.414(s)-1(d)(2)(iii) (which generally permits a definition of compensation to exclude all compensation in excess of a specified dollar amount) does not apply in determining the safe harbor compensation of NHCEs. Thus, for example, the plan may limit the period used to determine safe harbor compensation to the eligible employee's period of participation.

(c) *Safe harbor matching contribution requirement* —(1) *In general*. The safe harbor matching contribution requirement of this paragraph (c) is satisfied if, under the plan, qualified matching contributions are made on behalf of each eligible NHCE in an amount determined under the basic matching formula of section 401(k)(12)(B)(i)(I), as described in paragraph (c)(2) of this section,

or under an enhanced matching formula of section 401(k)(12)(B)(i)(II), as described in paragraph (c)(3) of this section.

(2) *Basic matching formula.* Under the basic matching formula, each eligible NHCE receives qualified matching contributions in an amount equal to the sum of—

(i) 100% of the amount of the employee's elective contributions that do not exceed 3% of the employee's safe harbor compensation; and

(ii) 50% of the amount of the employee's elective contributions that exceed 3% of the employee's safe harbor compensation but that do not exceed 5% of the employee's safe harbor compensation.

(3) *Enhanced matching formula.* Under an enhanced matching formula, each eligible NHCE receives a matching contribution under a formula that, at any rate of elective contributions by the employee, provides an aggregate amount of qualified matching contributions at least equal to the aggregate amount of qualified matching contributions that would have been provided under the basic matching formula of paragraph (c)(2) of this section. In addition, under an enhanced matching formula, the ratio of matching contributions on behalf of an employee under the plan for a plan year to the employee's elective contributions may not increase as the amount of an employee's elective contributions increases.

(4) *Limitation on HCE matching contributions.* The safe harbor matching contribution requirement of this paragraph (c) is not satisfied if the ratio of matching contributions made on account of an HCE's elective contributions under the cash or deferred arrangement for a plan year to those elective contributions is greater than the ratio of matching contributions to elective contributions that would apply with respect to any eligible NHCE with elective contributions at the same percentage of safe harbor compensation.

(5) *Use of safe harbor match not precluded by certain plan provisions —(i) Safe harbor matching contributions on employee contributions.* The safe harbor matching contribution requirement of this paragraph (c) will not fail to be satisfied merely because safe harbor matching contributions are made on both elective contributions and employee contributions if safe harbor matching contributions are made with respect to the sum of elective contributions and employee contributions on the same terms as safe harbor matching contributions are made with respect to elective contributions. Alternatively, the safe harbor matching contribution requirement of this paragraph (c) will not fail to be satisfied merely because safe harbor matching contributions are made on both elective contributions and employee contributions if safe harbor matching contributions on elective contributions are not affected by the amount of employee contributions.

(ii) *Periodic matching contributions.* The safe harbor matching contribution requirement of this paragraph (c) will not fail to be satisfied merely because the plan provides that safe harbor matching contributions will be made separately with respect to each payroll period (or with respect to all payroll periods ending with or within each month or quarter of a plan year) taken into account under the plan for the plan year, provided that safe harbor matching contributions

with respect to any elective contributions made during a plan year quarter are contributed to the plan by the last day of the immediately following plan year quarter.

(6) *Permissible restrictions on elective contributions by NHCEs* —(i) *General rule.* The safe harbor matching contribution requirement of this paragraph (c) is not satisfied if elective contributions by NHCEs are restricted, unless the restrictions are permitted by this paragraph (c)(6).

(ii) *Restrictions on election periods.* A plan may limit the frequency and duration of periods in which eligible employees may make or change cash or deferred elections under a plan. However, an employee must have a reasonable opportunity (including a reasonable period after receipt of the notice described in paragraph (d) of this section) to make or change a cash or deferred election for the plan year. For purposes of this paragraph (c)(6)(ii), a 30-day period is deemed to be a reasonable period to make or change a cash or deferred election.

(iii) *Restrictions on amount of elective contributions.* A plan is permitted to limit the amount of elective contributions that may be made by an eligible employee under a plan, provided that each NHCE who is an eligible employee is permitted (unless the employee is restricted under paragraph (c)(6)(v) of this section) to make elective contributions in an amount that is at least sufficient to receive the maximum amount of matching contributions available under the plan for the plan year, and the employee is permitted to elect any lesser amount of elective contributions. However, a plan may require eligible employees to make cash or deferred elections in whole percentages of compensation or whole dollar amounts.

(iv) *Restrictions on types of compensation that may be deferred.* A plan may limit the types of compensation that may be deferred by an eligible employee under a plan, provided that each eligible NHCE is permitted to make elective contributions under a definition of compensation that would be a reasonable definition of compensation within the meaning of §1.414(s)–1(d)(2). Thus, the definition of compensation from which elective contributions may be made is not required to satisfy the nondiscrimination requirement of §1.414(s)–1(d)(3).

(v) *Restrictions due to limitations under the Internal Revenue Code.* A plan may limit the amount of elective contributions made by an eligible employee under a plan—

(A) Because of the limitations of section 402(g) or 415; or

(B) Because, on account of a hardship distribution, an employee's ability to make elective contributions has been suspended for 6 months in accordance with §1.401(k)–1(d)(3)(iv)(E).

(7) *Examples.* The following examples illustrate the safe harbor contribution requirement of this paragraph (c):

Example 1. (i) Beginning January 1, 2006, Employer A maintains Plan L covering employees in Divisions D and E, each of which includes HCEs and NHCEs. Plan L contains a cash or deferred arrangement and provides qualified matching contributions equal to 100% of each eligible employee's elective contributions up to 3% of compensation

and 50% of the next 2% of compensation. For purposes of the matching contribution formula, safe harbor compensation is defined as all compensation within the meaning of section 415(c)(3) (a definition that satisfies section 414(s)). Also, each employee is permitted to make elective contributions from all safe harbor compensation within the meaning of section 415(c)(3) and may change a cash or deferred election at any time. Plan L limits the amount of an employee's elective contributions for purposes of section 402(g) and section 415, and, in the case of a hardship distribution, suspends an employee's ability to make elective contributions for 6 months in accordance with §1.401(k)-1(d)(3)(iv)(E). All contributions under Plan L are nonforfeitable and are subject to the withdrawal restrictions of section 401(k)(2)(B). Plan L provides for no other contributions and Employer A maintains no other plans. Plan L is maintained on a calendar-year basis, and all contributions for a plan year are made within 12 months after the end of the plan year.

(ii) Based on these facts, matching contributions under Plan L are safe harbor matching contributions because they are qualified matching contributions equal to the basic matching formula. Accordingly, Plan L satisfies the safe harbor contribution requirement of this paragraph (c).

Example 2. (i) The facts are the same as in *Example 1*, except that instead of providing a basic matching contribution, Plan L provides a qualified matching contribution equal to 100% of each eligible employee's elective contributions up to 4% of safe harbor compensation.

(ii) Plan L's formula is an enhanced matching formula because each eligible NHCE receives safe harbor matching contributions at a rate that, at any rate of elective contributions, provides an aggregate amount of qualified matching contributions at least equal to the aggregate amount of qualified matching contributions that would have been received under the basic safe harbor matching formula, and the rate of matching contributions does not increase as the rate of an employee's elective contributions increases. Accordingly, Plan L satisfies the safe harbor contribution requirement of this paragraph (c).

Example 3. (i) The facts are the same as in *Example 2*, except that instead of permitting each employee to make elective contributions from all compensation within the meaning of section 415(c)(3), each employee's elective contributions under Plan L are limited to 15% of the employee's basic compensation. *Basic compensation* is defined under Plan L as compensation within the meaning of section 415(c)(3), but excluding overtime pay.

(ii) The definition of basic compensation under Plan L is a reasonable definition of compensation within the meaning of §1.414(s)-1(d)(2).

(iii) Plan L will not fail to satisfy the safe harbor contribution requirement of this paragraph (c) merely because Plan L limits the amount of elective contributions and the types of compensation that may be deferred by eligible employees, provided that each eligible NHCE may make elective contributions equal to at least 4% of the employee's safe harbor compensation.

Example 4. (i) The facts are the same as in *Example 1*, except that Plan L provides that only employees employed on the last day of the plan year will receive a safe harbor matching contribution.

(ii) Even if the plan that provides for employee contributions and matching contributions satisfies the minimum coverage requirements of section 410(b)(1) taking into account this last-day requirement, Plan L would not satisfy the safe harbor contribution requirement of this paragraph (c) because safe harbor matching contributions are not made on behalf of all eligible NHCEs who make elective contributions.

(iii) The result would be the same if, instead of providing safe harbor matching contributions, Plan L provides for a 3% safe harbor nonelective contribution that is restricted to eligible employees under the cash or deferred arrangement who are employed on the last day of the plan year.

Example 5. (i) The facts are the same as in *Example 1*, except that instead of providing qualified matching contributions under the basic matching formula to employees in both Divisions D and E, employees in Division E are provided qualified matching contributions under the basic matching formula, while safe harbor matching contributions continue to be provided to employees in Division D under the enhanced matching formula described in *Example 2*.

(ii) Even if Plan L satisfies §1.401(a)(4)–4 with respect to each rate of matching contributions available to employees under the plan, the plan would fail to satisfy the safe harbor contribution requirement of this paragraph (c) because the rate of matching contributions with respect to HCEs in Division D at a rate of elective contributions between 3% and 5% would be greater than that with respect to NHCEs in Division E at the same rate of elective contributions. For example, an HCE in Division D who would have a 4% rate of elective contributions would have a rate of matching contributions of 100% while an NHCE in Division E who would have the same rate of elective contributions would have a lower rate of matching contributions.

(d) *Notice requirement* —(1) *General rule.* The notice requirement of this paragraph (d) is satisfied for a plan year if each eligible employee is given notice of the employee's rights and obligations under the plan and the notice satisfies the content requirement of paragraph (d)(2) of this section and the timing requirement of paragraph (d)(3) of this section. The notice must be in writing or in such other form as may be approved by the Commissioner. See §1.401(a)–21 of this chapter for rules permitting the use of electronic media to provide applicable notices to recipients with respect to retirement plans.

(2) *Content requirement* —(i) *General rule.* The content requirement of this paragraph (d)(2) is satisfied if the notice is—

(A) Sufficiently accurate and comprehensive to inform the employee of the employee's rights and obligations under the plan; and

(B) Written in a manner calculated to be understood by the average employee eligible to participate in the plan.

(ii) *Minimum content requirement.* Subject to the requirements of paragraph (d)(2)(iii) of this section, a notice is not considered sufficiently accurate and comprehensive unless the notice accurately describes—

(A) The safe harbor matching contribution or safe harbor nonelective contribution formula used under the plan (including a description of the levels of safe harbor matching contributions, if any, available under the plan);

(B) Any other contributions under the plan or matching contributions to another plan on account of elective contributions or employee contributions under the plan (including the potential for discretionary matching contributions) and the conditions under which such contributions are made;

(C) The plan to which safe harbor contributions will be made (if different than the plan containing the cash or deferred arrangement);

- (D) The type and amount of compensation that may be deferred under the plan;
- (E) How to make cash or deferred elections, including any administrative requirements that apply to such elections;
- (F) The periods available under the plan for making cash or deferred elections;
- (G) Withdrawal and vesting provisions applicable to contributions under the plan; and
- (H) Information that makes it easy to obtain additional information about the plan (including an additional copy of the summary plan description) such as telephone numbers, addresses and, if applicable, electronic addresses, of individuals or offices from whom employees can obtain such plan information.

(iii) *References to SPD.* A plan will not fail to satisfy the content requirements of this paragraph (d)(2) merely because, in the case of information described in paragraph (d)(2)(ii)(B) of this section (relating to any other contributions under the plan), paragraph (d)(2)(ii)(C) of this section (relating to the plan to which safe harbor contributions will be made) or paragraph (d)(2)(ii)(D) of this section (relating to the type and amount of compensation that may be deferred under the plan), the notice cross-references the relevant portions of a summary plan description that provides the same information that would be provided in accordance with such paragraphs and that has been provided (or is concurrently provided) to employees.

(3) *Timing requirement* —(i) *General rule.* The timing requirement of this paragraph (d)(3) is satisfied if the notice is provided within a reasonable period before the beginning of the plan year (or, in the year an employee becomes eligible, within a reasonable period before the employee becomes eligible). The determination of whether a notice satisfies the timing requirement of this paragraph (d)(3) is based on all of the relevant facts and circumstances.

(ii) *Deemed satisfaction of timing requirement.* The timing requirement of this paragraph (d)(3) is deemed to be satisfied if at least 30 days (and no more than 90 days) before the beginning of each plan year, the notice is given to each eligible employee for the plan year. In the case of an employee who does not receive the notice within the period described in the previous sentence because the employee becomes eligible after the 90th day before the beginning of the plan year, the timing requirement is deemed to be satisfied if the notice is provided no more than 90 days before the employee becomes eligible (and no later than the date the employee becomes eligible). Thus, for example, the preceding sentence would apply in the case of any employee eligible for the first plan year under a newly established plan that provides for elective contributions, or would apply in the case of the first plan year in which an employee becomes eligible under an existing plan that provides for elective contributions. If it is not practicable for the notice to be provided on or before the date specified in the plan that an employee becomes eligible, the notice will nonetheless be treated as provided timely if it is provided as soon as practicable after that date and the employee is permitted to elect to defer from all types of compensation that may be deferred under the plan earned beginning on the date the employee becomes eligible.

(e) *Plan year requirement* —(1) *General rule.* Except as provided in this paragraph (e) or in paragraph (f) of this section, a plan will fail to satisfy the requirements of sections 401(k)(12), 401(k)(13), and this section unless plan provisions that satisfy the rules of this section are adopted before the first day of the plan year and remain in effect for an entire 12-month plan year. In addition, except as provided in paragraph (g) of this section, a plan which includes provisions that satisfy the rules of this section will not satisfy the requirements of §1.401(k)–1(b) if it is amended to change such provisions for that plan year. Moreover, if, as described under paragraph (h)(4) of this section, safe harbor matching or nonelective contributions will be made to another plan for a plan year, provisions under that other plan specifying that the safe harbor contributions will be made and providing that the contributions will be QNECs or QMACs must also be adopted before the first day of that plan year.

(2) *Initial plan year.* A newly established plan (other than a successor plan within the meaning of §1.401(k)–2(c)(2)(iii)) will not be treated as violating the requirements of this paragraph (e) merely because the plan year is less than 12 months, provided that the plan year is at least 3 months long (or, in the case of a newly established employer that establishes the plan as soon as administratively feasible after the employer comes into existence, a shorter period). Similarly, a cash or deferred arrangement will not fail to satisfy the requirement of this paragraph (e) if it is added to an existing profit sharing, stock bonus, or pre-ERISA money purchase pension plan for the first time during that year provided that—

(i) The plan is not a successor plan; and

(ii) The cash or deferred arrangement is made effective no later than 3 months prior to the end of the plan year.

(3) *Change of plan year.* A plan that has a short plan year as a result of changing its plan year will not fail to satisfy the requirements of paragraph (e)(1) of this section merely because the plan year has less than 12 months, provided that—

(i) The plan satisfied the requirements of this section for the immediately preceding plan year; and

(ii) The plan satisfies the requirements of this section (determined without regard to paragraph (g) of this section) for the immediately following plan year (or for the immediately following 12 months if the immediately following plan year is less than 12 months).

(4) *Final plan year.* A plan that terminates during a plan year will not fail to satisfy the requirements of paragraph (e)(1) of this section merely because the final plan year is less than 12 months, provided that the plan satisfies the requirement of this section through the date of termination and either—

(i) The plan would satisfy the requirements of paragraph (g) of this section, treating the termination of the plan as a reduction or suspension of safe harbor matching contributions, other than the requirement that employees have a reasonable opportunity to change their cash or

deferred elections and, if applicable, employee contribution elections; or

(ii) The plan termination is in connection with a transaction described in section 410(b)(6)(C) or the employer incurs a substantial business hardship comparable to a substantial business hardship described in section 412(d).

(f) Plan amendments adopting safe harbor nonelective contributions —(1) General rule.

Notwithstanding paragraph (e)(1) of this section, a plan that provides for the use of the current year testing method may be amended after the first day of the plan year and no later than 30 days before the last day of the plan year to adopt the safe harbor method of this section, effective as of the first day of the plan year, using nonelective contributions under paragraph (b) of this section, but only if the plan provides the contingent and follow-up notices described in this section. A plan amendment made pursuant to this paragraph (f)(1) for a plan year may provide for the use of the safe harbor method described in this section solely for that plan year and a plan sponsor is not limited in the number of years for which it is permitted to adopt an amendment providing for the safe harbor method of this section using nonelective contributions under paragraph (b) of this section and this paragraph (f).

(2) Contingent notice provided. A plan satisfies the requirement to provide the contingent notice under this paragraph (f)(2) if it provides a notice that would satisfy the requirements of paragraph (d) of this section, except that, in lieu of setting forth the safe harbor contributions used under the plan as set forth in paragraph (d)(2)(ii)(A) of this section, the notice specifies that the plan may be amended during the plan year to include the safe harbor nonelective contribution and that, if the plan is amended, a follow-up notice will be provided.

(3) Follow-up notice requirement. A plan satisfies the requirement to provide a follow-up notice under this paragraph (f)(3) if, no later than 30 days before the last day of the plan year, each eligible employee is given a notice that states that the safe harbor nonelective contributions will be made for the plan year. The notice must be in writing or in such other form as may be prescribed by the Commissioner and is permitted to be combined with a contingent notice provided under paragraph (f)(2) of this section for the next plan year.

(g) Permissible reduction or suspension of safe harbor matching contributions —(1) General rule. A plan that provides for safe harbor matching contributions will not fail to satisfy the requirements of section 401(k)(3) for a plan year merely because the plan is amended during a plan year to reduce or suspend safe harbor matching contributions on future elective contributions (and, if applicable, employee contributions) provided that—

(i) All eligible employees are provided the supplemental notice in accordance with paragraph (g)(2) of this section;

(ii) The reduction or suspension of safe harbor matching contributions is effective no earlier than the later of 30 days after eligible employees are provided the notice described in paragraph (g)(2) of this section and the date the amendment is adopted;

(iii) Eligible employees are given a reasonable opportunity (including a reasonable period after receipt of the supplemental notice) prior to the reduction or suspension of safe harbor matching contributions to change their cash or deferred elections and, if applicable, their employee contribution elections;

(iv) The plan is amended to provide that the ADP test will be satisfied for the entire plan year in which the reduction or suspension occurs using the current year testing method described in §1.401(k)-2(a)(2)(ii); and

(v) The plan satisfies the requirements of this section (other than this paragraph (g)) with respect to amounts deferred through the effective date of the amendment.

(2) *Notice of suspension requirement.* The notice of suspension requirement of this paragraph (g)(2) is satisfied if each eligible employee is given a notice (in writing or such other form as prescribed by the Commissioner) that explains—

(i) The consequences of the amendment which reduces or suspends matching contributions on future elective contributions and, if applicable, employee contributions;

(ii) The procedures for changing their cash or deferred election and, if applicable, their employee contribution elections; and

(iii) The effective date of the amendment.

(h) *Additional rules* —(1) *Contributions taken into account.* A contribution is taken into account for purposes of this section for a plan year if and only if the contribution would be taken into account for such plan year under the rules of §1.401(k)-2(a) or 1.401(m)-2(a). Thus, for example, a safe harbor matching contribution must be made within 12 months of the end of the plan year. Similarly, an elective contribution that would be taken into account for a plan year under §1.401(k)-2(a)(4)(i)(B)(2) must be taken into account for such plan year for purposes of this section, even if the compensation would have been received after the close of the plan year.

(2) *Use of safe harbor nonelective contributions to satisfy other nondiscrimination tests.* A safe harbor nonelective contribution used to satisfy the nonelective contribution requirement under paragraph (b) of this section may also be taken into account for purposes of determining whether a plan satisfies section 401(a)(4). Thus, these contributions are not subject to the limitations on qualified nonelective contributions under §1.401(k)-2(a)(6)(ii), but are subject to the rules generally applicable to nonelective contributions under section 401(a)(4). See §1.401(a)(4)-1(b)(2)(ii). However, pursuant to section 401(k)(12)(E)(ii) and section 401(k)(13)(D)(iv), to the extent they are needed to satisfy the safe harbor contribution requirement of paragraph (b) of this section, safe harbor nonelective contributions may not be taken into account under any plan for purposes of section 401(l) (including the imputation of permitted disparity under §1.401(a)(4)-7).

(3) *Early participation rules.* Section 401(k)(3)(F) and §1.401(k)-2(a)(1)(iii)(A), which provide an alternative nondiscrimination rule for certain plans that provide for early participation, do not apply for purposes of section 401(k)(12), section 401(k)(13), and this section. Thus, a plan is not treated as satisfying this section with respect to the eligible employees who have not completed the minimum age and service requirements of section 410(a)(1)(A) unless the plan satisfies the requirements of this section with respect to such eligible employees. However, a plan is permitted to apply the rules of section 410(b)(4)(B) to treat the plan as two separate plans for purposes of section 410(b) and apply the safe harbor requirements of this section to one plan and apply the requirements of §1.401(k)-2 to the other plan. See §1.401(k)-1(b)(4)(vi), *Example 2*.

(4) *Satisfying safe harbor contribution requirement under another defined contribution plan.* Safe harbor matching or nonelective contributions may be made to the plan that contains the cash or deferred arrangement or to another defined contribution plan that satisfies section 401(a) or 403(a). If safe harbor contributions are made to another defined contribution plan, the safe harbor plan must specify the plan to which the safe harbor contributions are made and the contribution requirement of paragraph (b) or (c) of this section must be satisfied in the other defined contribution plan in the same manner as if the contributions were made to the plan that contains the cash or deferred arrangement. Consequently, the plan to which the contributions are made must have the same plan year as the plan containing the cash and deferred arrangement and each employee eligible under the plan containing the cash or deferred arrangement must be eligible under the same conditions under the other defined contribution plan. The plan to which the safe harbor contributions are made need not be a plan that can be aggregated with the plan that contains the cash or deferred arrangement.

(5) *Contributions used only once.* Safe harbor matching or nonelective contributions cannot be used to satisfy the requirements of this section with respect to more than one plan.

(i) [Reserved]

(j) *Qualified automatic contribution arrangement* —(1) *Automatic contribution requirement* —(i) *In general.* A cash or deferred arrangement is described in this paragraph (j) if it is an automatic contribution arrangement described in paragraph (j)(1)(ii) of this section where the default election under that arrangement is a contribution equal to the qualified percentage described in paragraph (j)(2) of this section multiplied by the eligible employee's compensation from which elective contributions are permitted to be made under the cash or deferred arrangement. For plan years beginning on or after January 1, 2010, the compensation used for this purpose must be safe harbor compensation as defined under paragraph (b)(2) of this section.

(ii) *Automatic contribution arrangement.* An automatic contribution arrangement is a cash or deferred arrangement within the meaning of §1.401(k)-1(a)(2) that provides that, in the absence of an eligible employee's affirmative election, a default election applies under which the employee is treated as having made an election to have a specified contribution made on his or her behalf under the plan. The default election begins to apply with respect to an eligible employee no earlier than a reasonable period of time after receipt of the notice describing the

automatic contribution arrangement. The default election ceases to apply with respect to an eligible employee for periods of time with respect to which the employee has an affirmative election that is currently in effect to—

(A) Have elective contributions made in a different amount on his or her behalf (in a specified amount or percentage of compensation); or

(B) Not have any elective contributions made on his or her behalf.

(iii) *Exception to automatic enrollment for certain current employees.* An automatic contribution arrangement will not fail to be a qualified automatic contribution arrangement merely because the default election provided under paragraph (j)(1)(i) of this section is not applied to an employee who was an eligible employee under the cash or deferred arrangement (or a predecessor arrangement) immediately prior to the effective date of the qualified automatic contribution arrangement and on that effective date had an affirmative election in effect (that remains in effect) to—

(A) Have elective contributions made on his or her behalf (in a specified amount or percentage of compensation); or

(B) Not have elective contributions made on his or her behalf.

(2) *Qualified percentage* —(i) *In general.* A percentage is a qualified percentage only if it—

(A) Is uniform for all employees (except to the extent provided in paragraph (j)(2)(iii) of this section);

(B) Does not exceed 10 percent; and

(C) Satisfies the minimum percentage requirements of paragraph (j)(2)(ii) of this section.

(ii) *Minimum percentage requirements* —(A) *Initial-period requirement.* The minimum percentage requirement of this paragraph (j)(2)(ii)(A) is satisfied only if the percentage that applies for the initial period is at least 3 percent. For this purpose, the initial period begins when the employee first has contributions made pursuant to a default election under an arrangement that is intended to be a qualified automatic contribution arrangement for a plan year and ends on the last day of the following plan year.

(B) *Second-year requirement.* The minimum percentage requirement of this paragraph (j)(2)(ii)(B) is satisfied only if the percentage that applies for the plan year immediately following the last day described in paragraph (j)(2)(ii)(A) of this section is at least 4 percent.

(C) *Third-year requirement.* The minimum percentage requirement of this paragraph (j)(2)(ii)(C) is satisfied only if the percentage that applies for the plan year immediately following the plan year described in paragraph (j)(2)(ii)(B) of this section is at least 5 percent.

(D) *Later years requirement.* A percentage satisfies the minimum percentage requirement of this paragraph (j)(2)(ii)(D) only if the percentage that applies for all plan years following the plan year described in paragraph (j)(2)(ii)(C) of this section is at least 6 percent.

(iii) *Exception to uniform percentage requirement.* A plan does not fail to satisfy the uniform percentage requirement of paragraph (j)(2)(i)(A) of this section merely because—

(A) The percentage varies based on the number of years (or portions of years) since the beginning of the initial period for an eligible employee;

(B) The rate of elective contributions under a cash or deferred election that is in effect for an employee immediately prior to the effective date of the default percentage under the qualified automatic contribution arrangement is not reduced;

(C) The rate of elective contributions is limited so as not to exceed the limits of sections 401(a)(17), 402(g) (determined with or without catch-up contributions described in section 402(g)(1)(C) or 402(g)(7)), and 415; or

(D) The default election provided under paragraph (j)(1)(i) of this section is not applied during the period an employee is not permitted to make elective contributions in order for the plan to satisfy the requirements of §1.401(k)–3(c)(6)(v)(B).

(iv) *Treatment of periods without default contributions.* The minimum percentages described in paragraph (j)(2)(ii) of this section are based on the date the initial period begins, regardless of whether the employee is eligible to make elective contributions under the plan after that date. Thus, for example, if an employee is ineligible to make contributions under the plan for 6 months because the employee had a hardship withdrawal and the 6-month period includes a date as of which the default minimum percentage is increased, then the default percentage must reflect that increase when the employee is permitted to resume contributions. However, for purposes of determining the date the initial period described in paragraph (j)(2)(ii)(A) of this section begins, a plan is permitted to treat an employee who for an entire plan year did not have contributions made pursuant to a default election under the qualified automatic contribution arrangement as if the employee had not had such contributions made for any prior plan year as well.

(k) *Modifications to contribution requirements and notice requirements for automatic contribution safe harbor* —(1) *In general.* A cash or deferred arrangement satisfies the contribution requirements of this paragraph (k) only if it satisfies the contribution requirements of either paragraph (b) or (c) of this section, as modified by the rules of paragraphs (k)(2) and (k)(3) of this section. In addition, a cash or deferred arrangement satisfies the notice requirement of section 401(k)(13)(E) only if the notice satisfies the additional requirements of paragraph (k)(4) of this section.

(2) *Lower matching requirement.* In applying the requirement of paragraph (c) of this section in the case of a cash or deferred arrangement, the basic matching formula is modified so that each eligible NHCE must receive the sum of—

(i) 100 percent of the employee's elective contributions that do not exceed 1 percent of the employee's safe harbor compensation; and

(ii) 50 percent of the employee's elective contributions that exceed 1 percent of the employee's safe harbor compensation but that do not exceed 6 percent of the employee's safe harbor compensation.

(3) *Modified nonforfeiture requirement.* A cash or deferred arrangement described in paragraph (j) of this section will not fail to satisfy the requirements of paragraph (b) or (c) of this section, as applicable, merely because the safe harbor contributions are not qualified nonelective contributions or qualified matching contributions provided that—

(i) The contributions are subject to the withdrawal restrictions that apply to QNECs and QMACs, as set forth in §1.401(k)–1(d); and

(ii) Any employee who has completed 2 years of service (within the meaning of section 411(a)) has a nonforfeitable right to the account balance attributable to the safe harbor contributions.

(4) *Additional notice requirements* —(i) *In general.* A notice satisfies the requirements of this paragraph (k)(4) only if it includes the additional information described in paragraph (k)(4)(ii) of this section and satisfies the timing requirements of paragraph (k)(4)(iii) of this section.

(ii) *Additional information.* A notice satisfies the additional information requirement of this paragraph (k)(4)(ii) only if it explains—

(A) The level of elective contributions which will be made on the employee's behalf if the employee does not make an affirmative election;

(B) The employee's right under the arrangement to elect not to have elective contributions made on the employee's behalf (or to elect to have such contributions made in a different amount or percentage of compensation); and

(C) How contributions under the arrangement will be invested (including, in the case of an arrangement under which the employee may elect among 2 or more investment options, how contributions will be invested in the absence of an investment election by the employee).

(iii) *Timing requirements.* A notice satisfies the timing requirements of this paragraph (k)(4)(iii) only if it is provided sufficiently early so that the employee has a reasonable period of time after receipt of the notice to make the elections described under paragraph (k)(4)(ii)(B) and (C) of this section. However, the requirement in the preceding sentence that an employee have a reasonable period of time after receipt of the notice to make an alternative election does not permit a plan to make the default election effective any later than the earlier of—

(A) The pay date for the second payroll period that begins after the date the notice is provided;
and

(B) The first pay date that occurs at least 30 days after the notice is provided.

[T.D. 9169, 69 FR 78154, Dec. 29, 2004, as amended by T.D. 9294, 71 FR 61887, Oct. 20, 2006;
T.D. 9447, 74 FR 8208, Feb. 24, 2009]