

GA. The interview could be conducted at the same time the household is scheduled for its PA or GA face-to-face interview. At any other recertification during that time period, the State agency may choose to interview the household by telephone. However, the State agency would be required to grant a face-to-face interview to any household that requests one.

Several State agencies suggested that group interviews or videotapes be used whenever possible to cover areas of the recertification process common to all recipients. Current regulations do not prohibit the use of group interviews for informing households about the Program and Program rights and responsibilities. However, a certification worker must obtain information about specific household circumstances in a setting which guarantees confidentiality and privacy, as required by 7 CFR 273.2(e)(1).

d. *Verification.* Current regulations at 7 CFR 273.14(c)(3) give State agencies the option of establishing timeframes for submission of verification information. To increase consistency with procedures for initial applications and provide sufficient time for households to obtain the required verification information, we are proposing to revise 7 CFR 273.14(b) to add a new paragraph (4) to require State agencies to allow households a minimum of 10 days in which to satisfy verification requirements.

Current regulations at 7 CFR 273.2(f)(8)(i) require State agencies to verify at recertification a change in income or actual utility expenses if the source has changed or the amount has changed by more than \$25, and previously unreported medical expenses and total recurring medical expenses which have changed by \$25 or more. 7 CFR 273.2(f)(8)(i) also requires that State agencies not verify income, total medical expenses, or actual utility expenses which are unchanged or have changed by \$25 or less, unless the information is "incomplete, inaccurate, inconsistent, or outdated." Several State agencies have requested that we simplify verification requirements at recertification by requiring them to only reverify information that is questionable, rather than information that is "incomplete, inaccurate, inconsistent or outdated." The Department does not see that there is any substantive difference between the terms "incomplete, inaccurate, inconsistent or outdated" and the term "questionable." Presumably, State agency caseworkers would consider questionable any information that is incomplete, inaccurate, inconsistent, or

outdated. Therefore, if replacing the words "incomplete, inaccurate, inconsistent, or outdated" with the word "questionable" will simplify Program administration for State agencies, we see no objection to doing so. We are proposing, therefore, to amend 7 CFR 273.2(f)(8)(i)(A) and (C), and (ii) to replace the terms "incomplete, inaccurate, inconsistent or outdated" with the term "questionable."

e. *Filing deadline.* Currently, 7 CFR 273.14(c)(1) provides that for monthly reporting households the deadline for filing an application for recertification is the normal date for filing a monthly report. Several State agencies have requested that, for the purpose of administrative efficiency and flexibility, the Department make the filing deadline for monthly reporters the 15th of the last month of the household's certification period (recertification month), the same as it is for nonmonthly reporting households.

We are proposing to revise 7 CFR 273.14(c) to give State agencies the option of making the filing deadline for monthly reporters either the 15th of the recertification month or the household's normal date for filing a monthly report.

## 2. Timely Processing

Current regulations at 7 CFR 273.14(d) provide that the State agency shall act to provide uninterrupted benefits to any household determined eligible after the household timely filed an application, attended an interview, and submitted all necessary verification information. Action to approve or deny a recertification application must be taken by the end of the certification period if the household has met all required application procedures. Households which are certified for one month or are in the second month of a two-month certification period must receive benefits within 30 days of their last issuance. Other households must receive benefits in their normal issuance cycle if they have met all processing requirements. If verification requirements are unsatisfied at the end of the recertification month, the State agency must provide benefits within five working days after the household supplies the missing verification information. If the State agency is at fault for delaying the household's benefits, it must provide benefits as soon as the household is determined eligible. Current regulations at 7 CFR 273.14(e) provide that eligible households which have complied with all requirements are entitled to restored benefits if the State agency does not provide benefits in the first month of the new certification period.

7 CFR 273.14(f)(1) currently addresses failure of the household to appear for an interview or provide verification information as required. 7 CFR 273.14(f)(2) provides requirements for households that do not file a timely application.

To clarify recertification requirements that address a variety of situations that may occur in application processing, we are proposing to reorganize sections 7 CFR 273.14(d), (e), and (f) into two new sections 7 CFR 273.14(d) and (e). New section 7 CFR 273.14(d) would combine all of the provisions of the previous sections relating to timeframes for providing benefits when all processing deadlines are met. New section 7 CFR 273.14(e) would address situations in which the household or the State agency fail to meet processing deadlines.

## 3. Delayed Processing

We are proposing to include in new section 273.14(e) requirements for providing benefits when delays in application processing occur. Section 273.14(e)(1) will address delays caused by the State agency, and section 273.14(e)(2) will address delays caused by the household.

We are also proposing a change in provisions for handling the recertification of households which do not comply with the requirements for interviews or verification. Under current regulations at 7 CFR 273.14(a)(3), a State agency may deny a household's application for recertification at the time a household's certification period expires or within 30 days after the date the application was filed as long as the household has had adequate time to satisfy verification requirements. Under current regulations at 7 CFR 273.14(a)(2), a household that fails to attend a scheduled interview or to provide required verification information within required timeframes loses its right to uninterrupted benefits but cannot be denied eligibility at that time, unless the household fails to cooperate or the household's certification period has elapsed.

To increase consistency with AFDC procedures and provide maximum flexibility to State agencies, we are proposing to include in revised section 7 CFR 273.14(e) a provision to allow State agencies the option of denying eligibility to households as soon as a failure to comply with the interview or verification requirement occurs. The State agency would be required to send the household a denial notice informing it that its application for recertification has been denied. The notice would have to contain the reason for the denial, the action required to continue