

Security's withdrawal from listing on the NYSE and from registration under section 12(b) of the Act³ and shall not affect its obligation to be registered under section 12(g) of the Act.⁴

Any interested person may, on or before October 14, 2003, submit by letter to the Secretary of the Securities and Exchange Commission, 450 Fifth Street, NW., Washington, DC 20549-0609, facts bearing upon whether the application has been made in accordance with the rules of the NYSE and what terms, if any, should be imposed by the Commission for the protection of investors. The Commission, based on the information submitted to it, will issue an order granting the application after the date mentioned above, unless the Commission determines to order a hearing on the matter.

For the Commission, by the Division of Market Regulation, pursuant to delegated authority.⁵

Jonathan G. Katz,
Secretary.

[FR Doc. 03-24377 Filed 9-25-03; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 8010-01-P

SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

Sunshine Act Meeting

FEDERAL REGISTER CITATION OF PREVIOUS ANNOUNCEMENT: [68 FR 53618, September 11, 2003]

STATUS: Closed meeting.

PLACE: 450 Fifth Street, NW., Washington, DC.

DATE AND TIME OF PREVIOUSLY ANNOUNCED MEETING: Thursday, September 18, 2003, 10 a.m.

CHANGE IN THE MEETING: Cancellation of meeting.

The Closed Meeting scheduled for Thursday, September 18, 2003, was cancelled.

For further information please contact: The Office of the Secretary at (202) 942-7070.

Dated: September 23, 2003.

Margaret H. McFarland,
Deputy Secretary.

[FR Doc. 03-24497 Filed 9-24-03; 11:20 am]

BILLING CODE 8010-01-P

SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

Sunshine Act Meeting

Notice is hereby given, pursuant to the provisions of the Government in the Sunshine Act, Pub. L. 94-409, that the Securities and Exchange Commission will hold the following meeting during the week of September 29, 2003:

A Closed Meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 30, 2003 at 2 p.m.

Commissioners, Counsel to the Commissioners, the Secretary to the Commission, and recording secretaries will attend the Closed Meeting. Certain staff members who have an interest in the matters may also be present.

The General Counsel of the Commission, or his designee, has certified that, in his opinion, one or more of the exemptions set forth in 5 U.S.C. 552b(c)(3), (5), (7), (9)(B) and (10) and 17 CFR 200.402(a) (3), (5), (7), (9)(ii) and (10), permit consideration of the scheduled matters at the Closed Meeting.

The subject matter of the Closed Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, September 30, 2003 will be:

Institution and settlement of administrative proceedings of an enforcement nature;
Institution and settlement of injunctive actions;
Formal orders of investigation; and
Adjudicatory matter.

At times, changes in Commission priorities require alterations in the scheduling of meeting items. For further information and to ascertain what, if any, matters have been added, deleted or postponed, please contact:

The Office of the Secretary at (202) 942-7070.

Dated: September 23, 2003.

Margaret McFarland,
Deputy Secretary.

[FR Doc. 03-24498 Filed 9-24-03; 11:20 am]

BILLING CODE 8010-01-P

SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

[Release No. 34-48511; File No. PCAOB File No. 2003-05]

Public Company Accounting Oversight Board; Notice of Filing of Proposed Rules Relating to Compliance With Auditing and Related Professional Practice Standards and Advisory Groups

September 22, 2003.

Pursuant to section 107(b) of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 (the "Act"),

notice is hereby given that on July 14, 2003, the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (the "Board" or the "PCAOB") filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (the "SEC" or "Commission") the proposed rules described in Items I and II below, which items have been prepared by the Board. The Commission is publishing this notice to solicit comments on the proposed rules from interested persons.

I. Board's Statement of the Terms of Substance of the Proposed Rules

On June 30, 2003, the Board adopted rules relating to compliance with auditing and related professional practice standards and relating to advisory groups. The proposal includes two rules (PCAOB Rules 3100 and 3700) and a definition that would appear in Rule 1001. The text of the proposed rules is as follows:

Section 1. General Provisions

Rule 1001. Definitions of Terms Employed in Rules

* * * * *

(a)(viii) Auditing and Related Professional Practice Standards.

The term "auditing and related professional practice standards" means the auditing standards, related attestation standards, quality control standards, ethical standards, and independence standards (including any rules implementing Title II of the Act), and any other professional standards, that are established or adopted by the Board under section 103 of the Act.

* * * * *

Section 7. Professional Standards

Part 1—General Requirements

Rule 3100. Compliance With Auditing and Related Professional Practice Standards

A registered public accounting firm and its associated persons shall comply with all applicable auditing and related professional practice standards.

* * * * *

Part 7—Establishment of Professional Standards

Rule 3700. Advisory Groups

(a) Formation.

To assist it in carrying out its responsibility to establish auditing and related professional practice standards, the Board will convene one or more advisory groups, in accordance with section 103(a)(4) of the Act.

(b) Composition.

Advisory groups, in combination or as sub-groups designated by the Board within one advisory group, will contain

³ 15 U.S.C. 78j(b).

⁴ 15 U.S.C. 78j(g).

⁵ 17 CFR 200.30-3(a)(1).

individuals with expertise in one or more of the following area—

- (1) accounting;
- (2) auditing;
- (3) corporate finance;
- (4) corporate governance;
- (5) investing in public companies; and
- (6) other areas that the Board deems to be relevant to one or more auditing or related professional practice standards.

(c) Selection of Members of Advisory Groups.

Members of advisory groups will be selected by the Board, in its sole discretion, based upon nominations, including self-nominations, received from any person or organization.

Note: The Board will announce, from time to time, periods during which it will receive nominations to an advisory group. During those periods, nominations may be submitted by any person or organization, including, but not limited to, any investor, any accounting firm, any issuer, and any institution of higher learning.

(d) Personal Membership.

Membership in an advisory group will be personal to the individuals selected to serve on the advisory group. A member's functions and responsibilities, including attendance at meetings, may not be delegated to others.

(e) Ethical Duties of Advisory Group Members.

Members of an advisory group shall comply with EC3, EC8(a), EC9, and, with respect to any private publication or public statement about the Board or any advisory group or any of the activities of the Board or any advisory group, EC10 of the Board's Ethics Code.

(f) Ad Hoc Task Forces.

The Board may, in its discretion, establish ad hoc task forces. The membership of such task forces may include, but is not limited to, advisory group members. To the extent not otherwise required, members of ad hoc task forces shall comply with paragraph (e) of this Rule.

II. Board's Statement of the Purpose of, and Statutory Basis for, the Proposed Rules

In its filing with the Commission, the Board included statements concerning the purpose of, and basis for, the proposed rules and discussed any comments it received on the proposed rules. The text of these statements may be examined at the places specified in Item IV below. The Board has prepared summaries, set forth in sections A, B and C below, of the most significant aspects of such statements.

A. Board's Statement of the Purpose of, and Statutory Basis for, the Proposed Rules

(a) Purpose

(i) Rules 1001(a)(viii) and 3100.

Rule 1001(a)(viii) defines "auditing and related professional practice standards" as the auditing standards, related attestation standards, quality control standards, ethical standards, and independence standards (including any rules implementing Title II of the Act), and any other professional standards, that are established or adopted by the Board under section 103 of the Act (hereafter referred to in this Section A. as "Standards").

Section 103(a) of the Act directs the Board, by rule, to establish auditing and related attestation standards, quality control standards, and ethics standards "to be used by registered public accounting firms in the preparation and issuance of audit reports, as required by [the] Act or the rules of the Commission, or as may be necessary or appropriate in the public interest or for the protection of investors." Section 103(b) of the Act also directs the Board to establish independence standards to implement, or as authorized under, Title II of the Act.¹

As a corollary to the Board's statutory authority to establish and amend Standards, all public accounting firms that are registered with the Board must comply with the Board's Standards. While this requirement is implicit in the Act, the Board has codified the obligation of registered firms to comply with the Board's Standards in Rule 3100. Any registered public accounting firm or person associated with such a firm that fails to adhere to applicable Board Standards may be the subject of a Board disciplinary proceeding in accordance with section 105 of the Act.²

¹ See also Report of the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, U.S. Senate, on S. 2673, S. Rep. No. 107-205 (July 26, 2002) ("The Committee has concluded that the Board's plenary authority in this area is essential for the Board's effective operation, a position taken during the hearings by a number of witnesses * * *"). Board Rules adopting or modifying auditing and related professional practice standards require approval by the Commission. In addition, the Board recognizes that the Commission may also establish professional standards applicable to accountants that practice before it and audit reports filed with it and that the Commission has the authority to institute proceedings to amend the Board's Rules, including those that establish auditing and related professional practice standards. See sections 2(a)(10), 3(c)(2), and 107(b)(5) of the Act.

² In addition, the Act provides that any violation of the Board's Rules is to be treated for all purposes in the same manner as a violation of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, 15 U.S.C. 78a *et seq.*, or the rules and regulations issued thereunder, and any person violating the Board's Rules "shall be subject

In general, the Board's Standards will apply to registered public accounting firms and their associated persons in connection with their audits of (and related attestations concerning) the financial statements of issuers, as defined in section 2(a)(7) of the Act, and those firms' auditing and related attestation practices.

(ii) Rule 3700.

While the Board will, by rule, establish Standards, it recognizes that the development of such Standards should be an open, public process in which investors, the accounting profession, the preparers of financial statements, and others will have the opportunity to participate. To this end, as discussed in PCAOB Release No. 2003-005 (April 18, 2003), the Board intends to provide for a public comment process on proposed standards.³ The Board's staff will, of course, be actively involved in the standards-setting process, but the Board also encourages proposals and recommendations on its standards-setting agenda and standards development projects from the public. Moreover, in order to obtain the advice of a broad range of experts, the Board has determined to form an advisory group, the Standing Advisory Group ("SAG"), which may be divided into sub-groups by the Board if the need for specialized advice arises. Finally, the Board may also establish one or more ad hoc task forces to assist the staff with the drafting of technical language, among other things.

Section 103(a)(4) of the Act provides that the Board shall "convene, or authorize its staff to convene, such expert advisory groups as may be appropriate * * * to make recommendations concerning the content (including proposed drafts) of auditing, quality control, ethics, independence, or other standards required to be established under this section." The Board has decided initially that it is likely to exercise this authority by convening the SAG to participate in the standards-setting process. Rule 3700 addresses the formation, composition, and other basic matters concerning advisory groups, including the SAG.

(1) Role, Size and Composition.

The role of the SAG will be to assist the Board in reviewing existing

to the same penalties, and to the same extent, as for a violation of [the Exchange] Act or such rules or regulations." Section 3(b)(1) of the Act.

³ In response to PCAOB Release No. 2003-005, the Board received several comments relating to the process by which the Board will establish standards. While this release is intended to address only the adoption of Rules 3100 and 3700, the Board will nevertheless take these comments into consideration in its standards-setting work.

Standards, in *evaluating* proposed Standards recommended by Board staff, Board-formed technical task forces or others and *recommending* to the Board new or amended Standards. The role of the SAG will not ordinarily include technical drafting (which will be performed by the Board's staff, with the assistance of ad hoc task forces, when necessary). Instead, the Board will look to the SAG to provide advice and insight as to the need to formulate new Standards or change existing Standards and opinions on the impact of proposed new or changed Standards.

The Board contemplates that the SAG initially will have approximately 25 members. As noted above, the Board may, based on the circumstances of particular projects, prior to or after the formation of the SAG, form ad hoc task forces of specially qualified persons selected by the Board to assist it with specific projects. Members of any appointed ad hoc task force may or may not be members of the SAG.

The SAG will be composed of individuals with a variety of backgrounds, including practicing auditors, preparers of financial statements, investors (both individual and institutional), and others.⁴ In order to achieve this diversity, the Board expects that no one field of expertise will predominate among the SAG membership. Although SAG members may be employed or otherwise affiliated with particular organizations, the Board expects SAG members to serve in their individual capacities and not to serve as representatives of particular interests, groups or employers.

(2) Nominations of SAG Members

In determining appointments to the SAG, the Board intends to solicit nominations, including self-nominations. Interested parties will have 45 days from the date of the Board's Notice ("Notice") to the public to submit nominations on a form which will be provided in the Notice. Interested parties who have submitted nominations prior to the publication of the Notice, will be sent nomination forms for completion at the time of publication of the Notice.

(3) Qualifications

In evaluating nominations for the SAG, the Board will seek individuals with an interest in the quality of the audits of public companies. The Board may also consider certain factors in determining SAG appointments including but not limited to the following—

(a) SAG members will be individuals of integrity, with an understanding of the responsibilities for and the nature of financial disclosure required under the securities laws and the obligations of accountants with respect to the preparation of and issuance of audit reports with respect to such disclosures; and

(b) SAG members will have a working knowledge of one or more of the following subjects and a general understanding of the remaining subjects—

- generally accepted auditing standards (as developed by previous auditing standards setting bodies and adopted by the Board as Standards and, in the future, as set from time to time by the Board);
- generally accepted accounting principles;
- the creation, audit or analysis of public financial statements;
- public company corporate governance; and
- other fields that the Board deems to be relevant.

(4) Term

Unless the appointment is revoked for cause, as determined by the Board, or unless the SAG member voluntarily resigns from the SAG, membership on the SAG will be for a term of two years; provided, however, that approximately 50 percent of the initial members will be appointed for a three-year term to assure continuity. Members will not be limited in the number of terms that they may serve.

(5) Conditions of Membership

Rule 3700(d) specifically states that members of the SAG will serve in their individual capacities and therefore may not delegate their duties, including attendance at meetings, as SAG members. In addition, each appointee to the SAG shall agree in writing to the following "conditions of membership" in order to avoid potential conflicts of interest and to assure that the Board's standards-setting agenda is met—

(a) to serve on a voluntary basis without compensation from the Board;⁵

(b) to seek constructive resolutions to issues raised by the Board for the SAG;

(c) to act in the public interest in his or her individual capacity and not as a representative of any constituency;

(d) to attend at least 75 percent of all SAG meetings;⁶

⁵ SAG members shall be entitled to reimbursement for documented reasonable travel expenses relating to participation in official SAG meetings or other SAG activities.

⁶ Attendance may be in person or by telephone or teleconference. SAG members who fail to participate in the minimum number of meetings shall be subject to removal by the Board unless

(e) to agree to spend, at an expected minimum, between 50 and 100 hours per year on SAG matters or such reasonably greater amount of time as may be necessary to achieve the goals of the SAG and the Board;⁷

(f) to refrain from using his or her position on the SAG to influence Board members or Board staff on matters directly affecting that SAG member or his or her employer, business partners or clients;⁸

(g) to recuse himself or herself, or otherwise withdraw from, consideration of any matter before the SAG or the Board directly affecting such SAG member, his or her employer, business partners or clients. If recusal or withdrawal is not practical in either such member's or the Board's opinion, such SAG member shall resign from the SAG;⁹

(h) to be bound by EC3, EC8(a), EC9, and, with respect to any private publication or public statement regarding the Board or the SAG or any of the activities of the Board or the SAG, EC10 of the Board's Ethics code;¹⁰

(i) to annually certify his or her continuing compliance with "the conditions of membership;" and

(j) to agree to any such other provisions that the Board may deem

excused from attendance by the Chair of the SAG for good reason.

⁷ During the first year of the SAG, members may expect to spend more than the minimum number of hours on SAG matters.

⁸ SAG members are not precluded from appearing or practicing before the Board regarding matters generally affecting all issuers or registered public accounting firms, including, indirectly, the member, his or her employer, business partners or clients. Accordingly, a SAG member who is employed by a registered public accounting firm would be permitted to be involved in preparing a comment on a Board rule proposal that generally affects all issuers or registered public accounting firms.

⁹ Matters generally affecting issuers or registered public accounting firms, even though affecting the SAG member, his or her employer, business partners or clients, shall not require the member to recuse or withdraw him or herself from consideration of the matter or to resign from SAG. The Board expects that most standards-setting projects will affect issuers (or categories of issuers) and registered public accounting firms and their associated persons in a generally similar manner; however, if a standard would have a unique or disproportionate effect on a particular issuer or firm, a SAG member employed by that issuer or firm would be required under Rule 3700 to recuse himself or herself.

¹⁰ The text of the Ethics Code as adopted by the PCAOB on June 30, 2003 is available on the PCAOB Web site. In PCAOB Release No. 2003-008 (June 30, 2003), the Board clarified that for purposes of applying EC8(a) to SAG members, the SAG members shall not be considered to lack independence or objectivity with regard to SAG matters merely because they (or their employer, business partners or clients) are subject to the direct or indirect oversight of the Board.

⁴ The Board also anticipates appointing individuals from academia and State accounting regulators, among others, to the SAG.

necessary to avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest.¹¹

(6) Meetings and Board Relations.

The Board has determined that the first Chair of the SAG will be the Board's Chief Auditor and Director of Professional Standards who will be a non-voting member of the SAG. The Board will approve the agenda for all annual, semi-annual or quarterly SAG meetings as set forth below. Agenda items may also be added where the Board determines that the assistance of the SAG is required in response to emerging issues or problems. The Chair will be responsible for preparing the meeting agenda, organizing and overseeing meetings, conference calls and related activities, acting as the general liaison to the Board and finalizing all submissions to the Board based on the SAG recommendations.

The SAG will hold an annual meeting to discuss the agenda presented to the SAG on the annual standards-setting process and related matters. The SAG will also hold a semi-annual meeting. Both the annual and the semi-annual meetings will be open to the public. Meetings of the SAG may also be held, at the direction of the Board or the Chair, during the intervening quarters. In addition, at the direction of the Chair, monthly meetings of the SAG may be held, by video or teleconference, for the Board's staff to report on new issues raised by the Board for the SAG's consideration and to discuss the status of pending issues. Final decisions on recommendations to the Board and related activities will be conducted at the annual, semi-annual, or other open meeting of the SAG.¹² The meetings held in the quarters between the annual and semi-annual meeting, if any, and the monthly meetings will not generally be open to the public.

If so directed by the Chair of the SAG, the SAG may convene hearings, roundtable discussions or other fact-finding activities designed to assist the SAG in the development of recommendations on new or amended

Standards or other recommendations to the Board.

Decisions on whether a recommendation should be made to the Board will be by a majority of the SAG members present in person or by video or teleconference. Recommendations from the SAG will be presented to the Board at an open meeting of the Board. Such recommendations will be provided in writing, including dissenting opinions, if any, by SAG members. The Board retains the exclusive authority to adopt, modify, or reject any SAG recommendation, in its sole discretion, in order to protect investors by improving the fairness and reliability of corporate disclosures as set forth in the Act.

(b) Statutory Basis

The statutory basis for the proposed rules is Title I of the Act.

B. Board's Statement on Burden on Competition

The Board does not believe that the proposed rules will result in any burden on competition that is not necessary or appropriate in furtherance of the purposes of the Act. Under the proposed rule concerning compliance with standards, all registered public accounting firms and their associated persons must comply with all applicable auditing and related professional practice standards. The functional equivalent of this requirement is found in the Act, which provides for the Board to impose sanctions on registered firms or associated persons who violate such standards, and the codification of that requirement in the Board's rules does not add to the burden already imposed by the Act. The rules relating to advisory groups do not impose any burden on competition but, rather, provide for public participation, on a voluntary basis, in the process of advising the Board on the establishment of standards.

C. Board's Statement on Comments on the Proposed Rules Received From Members, Participants or Others

The Board released the proposed rules for public comment in PCAOB Release No. 2003-005 (April 18, 2003). A copy of PCAOB Release No. 2003-005 and the comment letters received in response to the PCAOB's request for comment are available on the PCAOB's Web site at <http://www.pcaobus.org>. The Board received 22 written comments. The Board has clarified and modified certain aspects of the proposed rules in response to comments it received, as discussed below.

The Board had proposed to use "professional auditing standards" as the term defined in Rule 1001(a)(viii). Several commenters expressed concern that characterizing attestation, quality control, ethical, and independence standards as "professional auditing standards" would confuse people as to the defined term's meaning. To address these concerns, the Board has chosen to use the term "auditing and related professional practice standards" as the defined term for the standards established or adopted by the Board under section 103 of the Act. The Board has used the longer term "auditing and related professional practice standards," rather than the shorter "professional standards," because the term "professional standards" is defined otherwise in section 2(a)(10) of the Act. The term "auditing and related professional practice standards" is similar to that portion of the definition of the term "professional standards" that appears in section 2(a)(10)(B) of the Act. (Hereafter in this section C., the term "Standards" shall be used to refer to the standards encompassed by the defined term "auditing and related professional practice standards.")

In addition, the Board's proposed definition was based on a portion of the definition of "professional standards" in section 2(a)(10)(B) of the Act. For purposes of clarity, the Board has modified this definition slightly to track more closely the description of the standards the Board will set in section 103(a)(1) of the Act. The definition still includes any other type of standard provided for in the definition of "professional standards" in section 2(a)(10)(B) of the Act that the Board establishes or adopts under section 103 of the Act. Accordingly, the definition, as revised, covers the same scope of standards as the Board's proposed rule.

A number of commenters suggested that proposed Rule 3100 was either beyond the Board's authority or would create the impression that the Rule applied to areas outside the Board's authority. To address these concerns, commenters suggested adding language about the scope of the Board's authority to Rule 3100. After considering these comments, the Board decided to adopt the Rule as proposed. Rule 3100 requires registered public accounting firms and their associated persons to comply with all *applicable* Standards. Accordingly, if the Board's Standards do not apply to an engagement or other activity of the firm, Rule 3100, by its

¹¹ The Commission understands that paragraphs (f) and (g) of the conditions of membership are intended to implement particular aspects of Rule 3700(e). In addition, the Commission understands that paragraph (j) is intended to address other individual conflict of interest situations of advisory group members that may arise, as distinct from rules of general applicability that would be subject to Commission approval.

¹² The Board expects the SAG to make decisions in an efficient and speedy manner. To this end, the SAG need not defer decisions on recommendations for the annual or semi-annual open meetings. Rather, at the direction of the Chair, the SAG may make decisions on recommendations at any meeting, so long as it is open to the public in some manner, including, at the direction of the Chair, telephonically.

own terms, does not apply to that engagement or activity.¹³

Finally, one commenter suggested that Rule 3100 also require registered public accounting firms and their associated person to be duly licensed, registered or permitted or otherwise to hold valid practice privileges and be in good standing under the laws of each applicable state. Registration with the Board does not supersede state registration or licensing requirements and the Board expects registered public accounting firms and their associated persons to comply with state and other applicable legal requirements.¹⁴ Rule 3100, however, is merely intended to codify the obligation of registered public accounting firms and their associated persons to comply with Board Standards and to ensure that the Board's Standards are enforceable. Accordingly, the Board decided not to amend the Rule as proposed to reflect this suggestion. Authorities other than the Board may nevertheless require that accounting firms or individual auditors comply with the Board's Standards in the conduct of audits of (or attestations concerning) the financial statements of non-issuers.¹⁵ In that event, those authorities may enforce the Board's Standards pursuant to their own processes.

In addressing proposed Rule 3700, commenters suggested that it might be

appropriate to establish more than one advisory group since expertise is likely to be required in more than one specialized area. The Board is aware that it may need advice in one or more specialized areas. However, the Board has determined to form only one standing advisory group, the SAG. This group, however, may, at the Board's direction, form specialized sub-groups as needed. In addition, the Board may form ad hoc task forces to work with Board staff in formulating Standards in specialized areas which may then, in the Board's discretion, be added to the SAG's agenda for discussion at SAG meetings.

In addition, commenters recommended adding other specific groups from which nominations could be received to the groups identified in Rule 3700(c) as proposed. After careful consideration of these comments, the Board determined that Rule 3700(c) should reflect the Board's intention to accept nominations from all sources. Accordingly, Rule 3700(c) was revised to state that the Board will accept nominations from any person or organization, including self-nominations. A note to this part of Rule 3700 provides that the Board will announce, from time to time, periods during which it will receive nominations for an advisory group.

With respect to qualifications of the advisory group members, one commenter suggested that all members have qualifications similar to those "requirements set forth for audit committee members in recently issued stock exchange and SEC" rules or proposed rules. The New York Stock Exchange ("NYSE") proposed listing requirements require that all members of audit committees of listed companies be financially literate. In addition, at least one member of the audit committee must meet the definition of an "audit committee financial expert."¹⁶ The NASDAQ Stock Market ("NASDAQ") proposed rules regarding qualifications for service on audit committees require that all audit committee members must be able to read and understand financial statements including a company's balance sheet, income statement, and cash flow statement and that the audit committee have at least one member who meets the definition of an "audit committee financial expert."¹⁷ After considering this comment, the Board decided to adopt the Rule as proposed

by the Board. While Rule 3700 does not specifically state the qualifications each member must have, the Rule does set forth the types of expertise that the Board will look for in advisory group members. In addition, as noted in Section C.4. of this Release, the Board may also consider certain specific qualifications in selecting nominees to the SAG. The Board believes that it will likely select members who, at a minimum, would meet the general qualifications set forth for "all" audit committee members in the proposed Rules of the NYSE and NASDAQ while providing the Board with the flexibility to select members from a broad spectrum of backgrounds to assist in meeting the requirements of the Act. SAG members will be selected based upon qualifications which will be elicited from them on a nomination form and through the evaluative process.

Furthermore, commenters suggested that the composition of the SAG be flexible because the Board may find that it is unable to attract a sufficient number of qualified members from fields such as finance and investment. In response to this concern, it should be noted that the Board expects that the SAG will be broadly representative and that no one field of expertise will predominate among the SAG membership. Other concerns regarding composition related to assuring that the SAG have a sufficient number of members with technical expertise including requiring a majority of members to be practicing auditors. Although the Board certainly intends that the SAG have practicing auditors among its members, the Board believes that it is important that the SAG be able to provide advice in a broad range of areas, including technical auditing expertise, and that technical expertise in particular areas may be obtained by forming ad hoc task forces, as needed and as appropriate for particular standards-setting projects. Other commenters recommended that—

(a) the four largest auditing firms be represented on the SAG;

(b) non-U.S. auditors be represented;

(c) the number of members associated with a single firm, company or association be limited;

(d) membership be dispersed among those affiliated with firms, companies and associations of various sizes; and

(e) there be a balance between financial information suppliers (representatives of public companies and auditors) and financial information users (equity and debt investors).

As noted above, the Board recognizes the need to have diversity on the SAG and in selecting members will keep

¹³ For example, the Board's Interim Auditing Standards provide that, "[i]n connection with the preparation or issuance of any audit report, a registered public accounting firm, and its associated persons, shall comply with generally accepted auditing standards, as described in the AICPA Auditing Standards Board's Statement of Auditing Standards No. 95, as in existence on April 16, 2003 (Codification of Statements on Auditing Standards, AU § 150 (AICPA 2002))." See Rule 3200T. The term "audit report" is defined in the Act and the Board's Rules to mean the audit of an issuer. See Rule 1001(a)(vi), adopted by the Board in PCAOB Release. No. 2003-007. Moreover, the Board notes that it would not be a correct description of its authority to say, as one commenter suggested Rule 3100 provide, that "A registered public accounting firm and its associated persons shall comply with all applicable professional auditing standards *in performing an audit of an issuer.*" Particularly with respect to the quality control standards the Board is authorized to establish, the Board may adopt standards that, while related to registered public accounting firms' audit practices, must be complied with other than in the course of performing an audit. Cf. section 103(a)(2)(B) of the Act (requiring the Board to include, among the "quality control standards that it adopts with respect to the issuance of audit reports, requirements * * * relating to * * * hiring, professional development, and advancement of personnel").

¹⁴ See Rule 2-01(a) of Regulation S-X, 17 CFR 200.2-01(a).

¹⁵ Cf. section 209 of the Act (stating that "[i]n supervising nonregistered public accounting firms and their associated persons, appropriate State regulatory authorities should make an independent determination of the proper standards applicable * * *").

¹⁶ See SEC Release No. 34-47672; File No. SR-NYSE-2002-33 (April 11, 2003).

¹⁷ See SEC Release No. 34-47516; File No. SR-NASD-2002-141 (March 17, 2003).

diversity in mind while assuring that no one expertise will predominate among the SAG membership.

With respect to the actual functions of the SAG, one commenter, suggested that the SAG be involved in all standards-setting proposals while another commenter recommended that the actual drafting of the Standards fall within the SAG's authority. In order to maintain flexibility in the rulemaking process, the Board determined not to revise the proposed Rule to reflect these comments. Although the SAG is likely to be involved in the Board's standards-setting process as discussed in the Release, the Board does not intend to make SAG involvement mandatory to every standards-setting project. In addition, the actual drafting of the Standards is likely to be done by the Board's staff assisted by ad hoc task forces where necessary.

Another comment related to recommending that the SAG work toward "harmonizing" international standards. Neither Rule 3100 nor 3700 is intended to address substantive standards-setting issues. Rather the Board intends to address such issues, including cooperation with standards setters in other jurisdictions, in the future.

Commenters also made recommendations regarding SAG procedural matters. These commenters suggested that the Board address—

- (a) the process for making recommendations on Standards for consideration by the Board;
- (b) whether or not SAG meetings would be open to the public;
- (c) the format and the frequency of the meetings;
- (d) the process by which the Board will set the SAG's agenda;
- (e) the appointment of a Chair for the SAG;
- (f) whether the Board will provide all resources for drafting, editing, monitoring comments and publishing new and amended Standards;
- (g) the term of appointment to the SAG; and
- (h) an avenue for minority viewpoints to be expressed in any report or recommendation to the Board.

With the exception of the comment on resources for drafting and publishing new Standards, the Board has addressed all of these comments in Section B.7. of the Release. In summary, the SAG will hold an annual meeting and a semi-annual meeting. Additional meetings may be held in the intervening quarters. Monthly telephonic meetings are also expected to be held at the discretion of the Chair. The annual and semi-annual meetings, and any meeting at which the

SAG makes a final decision on a recommendation to the Board, will be open to the public. Agenda items for the SAG will be driven in part by the schedule to be set by the Board for the review of the Interim Auditing Standards. Other agenda items will be added by the Board where the Board determines that a response to emerging issues or problems connected with audits needs to be addressed. The Board determined that the first Chair of the SAG will be the Board's Chief Auditor and Director of Professional Standards. All SAG members will be appointed for two-year terms except that approximately one-half of the appointees initially appointed to the SAG will be appointed for a three-year term to assure continuity. There will be no limits on the terms that a member of the SAG may serve. The Board anticipates that drafting, editing, monitoring comments and publishing, will be conducted by the Board and its staff. To the extent that the SAG is specifically authorized by the Board to undertake any of these functions and the expenses have been preapproved by the Board or a staff member delegated by the Board, the Board will cover the SAG's costs.

In response to the issue of whether the SAG's meetings will be open to the public and in order to assure that the public is informed of the SAG's operations, the Board determined that the annual and semi-annual meetings of the SAG will be open. In addition, decisions on making recommendations to the Board will only be made at an open meeting of the SAG. All recommendations to the Board by the SAG will be presented to the Board in open public meetings of the Board and such presentations will include the presentation of minority views of the SAG members. Finally, it should be noted that Board standards-setting proposals will be subject to the public comment process before being adopted by the Board.

With respect to Rule 3700(e) relating to the ethical duties of the SAG members, one commenter recommended that the SAG members be subject to Section EC14, the certification requirements, of the Ethics Code. In response to this comment, the Board added to its "conditions of membership" described in Section C of the Release, a requirement that members of the SAG shall annually certify their continuing compliance with the "conditions of membership." A second commenter recommended that both Rule 3700(e) and EC8(a) of the Ethics Code be clarified to confirm that being a practicing auditor does not, in and of

itself, constitute a financial interest requiring recusal. Section EC8(a) of the Ethics Code was revised to add an explanatory note that clarifies this issue.¹⁸ A third commenter recommended that members of the SAG be prohibited from "unauthorized" speaking for the Board. In response to this comment, the Board revised Rule 3700(e) to make EC10 of the Board's Ethics Code applicable to any private publication or public statement by an advisory group member with regard to the Board or the advisory group or any of the activities of the Board or the advisory group. Finally, a fourth commenter recommended that a member of the SAG be permitted to share SAG material with support personnel within the member's home organization who are assigned to assist the member in his or her duties. The Board did not add a provision to address this concern. The Board believes that SAG members will normally be able to perform their responsibilities without needing access to non-public Board information. To the extent that it may be appropriate, from time to time, to permit non-public standards-setting information to be shared with individuals outside the SAG, including to permit SAG members to consult technical experts who are not employees or staff of the Board, the Board may require that such individuals agree to the confidentiality provisions under Section EC9 of the Ethics Code.

III. Date of Effectiveness of the Proposed Rules and Timing for Commission Action

Section 19(b) of the Exchange Act provides that within 35 days of the date of publication of this notice in the **Federal Register**, or within such longer period (i) as the Commission may designate up to 90 days of such date if it finds such longer period to be appropriate and publishes its reasons for so finding or (ii) as to which the Board consents, the Commission will:

- (a) by order approve such proposed rules; or
- (b) institute proceedings to determine whether the proposed rules should be disapproved.

IV. Solicitation of Comments

Interested persons are invited to submit written data, views and arguments concerning the foregoing, including whether the proposed rules are consistent with the requirements of Title I of the Act. Persons making written submissions should file six

¹⁸ See PCAOB Release No. 2003-008 (June 30, 2003).

copies thereof with the Secretary, Securities and Exchange Commission, 450 Fifth Street, NW., Washington, DC 20549-0609. Copies of the submission, all subsequent amendments, all written statements with respect to the proposed rules that are filed with the Commission, and all written communications relating to the proposed rules between the Commission and any person, other than those that may be withheld from the public in accordance with the provisions of 5 U.S.C. 552, will be available for inspection and copying in the Commission's Public Reference Room. Copies of such filing will also be available for inspection and copying at the principal office of the PCAOB. All submissions should refer to File No. PCAOB-2003-05 and should be submitted by October 17, 2003.

By the Commission.

Margaret H. McFarland,

Deputy Secretary.

[FR Doc. 03-24324 Filed 9-25-03; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 8010-01-P

SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

[Release No. 34-48506; File No. PCAOB-2003-04]

Public Company Accounting Oversight Board; Notice of Filing of Proposed Ethics Code

September 22, 2003.

Pursuant to section 107(b) of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 (the "Act"), notice is hereby given that on September 23, 2003, the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (the "Board" or the "PCAOB") filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (the "Commission") the proposed rules described in Items I, II, and III below, which items have been prepared by the Board. The Commission is publishing this notice to solicit comments on the proposed rules from interested persons.

I. Board's Statement of the Terms of Substance of the Proposed Rules

On June 30, 2003, the Board adopted an Ethics Code ("Code" or "EC") to govern the conduct of its members, employees, and certain contractors and consultants. The proposed Code consists of 14 sections (EC 1 through 14). The text of the Ethics Code (technical numbering changes in this release made pursuant to authorization from the PCAOB) is as follows:

Ethics Code

EC1. Application of Code

The provisions of this Ethics Code apply, according to their terms, to—

- (a) present and former Board members and staff;
- (b) the spouse, spousal equivalent, and dependents of Board members and staff; and
- (c) designated contractors and consultants to the Board.

Note: Rule 3700(e) requires members of a Board advisory group to comply with certain provisions of the Ethics Code.

EC2. Definitions

(a) Reference to Rules of the Board
Unless the context requires otherwise, the definitions provided in Section 1001 of the Rules of the Board apply to the words and terms contained in this Ethics Code.

(b) Code
The term "Code" means this Ethics Code, as it may be amended from time to time.

(c) Dependent
The term "dependent" of a Board member or staff means a person who receives more than half of his or her support for the most recent calendar year from the Board member or staff.

(d) Designated Contractors and Consultants
The term "designated contractors and consultants" means certain persons or business organizations—

- (1) with which the Board enters into contracts for services, including contracts that provide for both goods and services;
- (2) which the Board, or its designate, has determined should be subject to this Code, in whole or in part; and
- (3) for which the contract contains a provision expressly incorporating this Code, in whole or in part.

Note: The Board will maintain a list of designated contractors and consultants, which will be available to the public. Nothing in this provision will restrict the Board's right to impose additional contractual restrictions and limitations on any contractor or consultant. The Board is committed not to use its contracting authority to convert a person who would ordinarily be an employee to a contractor or consultant, as a means of allowing that person to be excluded from the provisions of this Code.

(e) Honoraria
The term "honoraria" means anything with more than a nominal value, whether provided in cash or otherwise, and which is provided in exchange for a speech, panel participation, publication or lecture. Neither the waiver of conference fees nor

acceptance of a modest speakers-only meal constitutes "honoraria."

Note: Items, which are provided to all conference participants, including speakers, are not provided "in exchange for" a speech and thus not considered to be "honoraria."

(f) Practice

The term "practice" means—
(1) knowingly acting as an agent or attorney for, or otherwise representing any other person in any formal or informal appearance before the Board or Commission with respect to Board-related matters; or

(2) making any oral or written communication on behalf of any other person to, and with the intent to influence, the Board or Commission with respect to Board-related matters.

Note: For purposes of this definition, participating in the financial reporting process as the officer or director of an issuer or participating in an audit of an issuer's financial statements does not, in and of itself, constitute practice before the Board or the Commission.

(g) Professional Staff or Professional Staff of the Board

The terms "professional staff" or "professional staff of the Board" mean those persons who are employed by the Board and who are exempt, pursuant to Section 13(a)(1) of the Fair Labor Standards Act (29 U.S.C. 201 et seq.), from Sections 6 and 7 (minimum wage and overtime provisions) of that act.

Note: These terms may, according to the context, alternatively be used to refer to a single such employee, or to all such employees.

(h) Staff or Staff of the Board

The terms "staff" or "staff of the Board" mean those persons who are employed by the Board.

Note: These terms may, according to the context, alternatively be used to refer to a single such employee, or to all such employees.

EC3. General Principles

(a) The purpose of this Code is to maintain the highest standards of ethical conduct among Board members and staff, and to provide the public with confidence in the objectivity of the Board's decisions by seeking to avoid both actual and perceived conflicts of interest among Board members and staff. The general principles within this section form the basis for the ethics rules and standards of conduct contained in the Code. When a situation is not covered by the Code's specific standards, Board members and staff shall apply the principles set forth in this section in determining whether their conduct is proper.