

D. Accounting for Cost of Removal That Does Not Constitute a Legal Obligation

33. The Commission did not propose to change its accounting under parts 101, 201 and 352 for the cost of removal for amounts that result from other than asset retirement obligations.

Comments Received

34. Several commenters request that the Commission specify in the final rule that any cost of removal for non-legal retirement obligations remain in accumulated depreciation.²⁷ Certain other commenters suggest that the Commission should make certain modifications to the Uniform Systems of Accounts under part 101 and part 201 to include the amount of cost of removal for non-legal obligations as regulatory liabilities in account 254. Other regulatory liabilities, instead of accumulated depreciation for public utilities, licensees and natural gas companies.²⁸

35. One commenter recommends that the Commission exclude the cost of removal that does not qualify as a legal retirement obligation from the depreciation accrual and instead capitalize any removal costs related to the asset replaced as part of the costs of replacing the utility plant and if no replacement of the asset occurs, the cost of removal for non-legal retirement obligations should be expensed in the income statement.²⁹

Commission Response

36. As proposed in the NOPR, the rule applies to legal obligations associated with the retirement of tangible long-lived assets. Under the existing requirements of the Uniform Systems of Accounts removal costs that are not asset retirement obligations are included as a component of the depreciation expense and recorded in accumulated depreciation.³⁰ The Commission notes that certain jurisdictional entities may have been receiving specific allowances for cost of removal for non-legal retirement obligations as a specific component in their rates approved by their regulators. The Commission did not propose any changes to its existing accounting requirements for cost of removal for non-legal retirement obligations. Accordingly, jurisdictional entities are accounting for such costs consistent with the requirements of the

Uniform Systems of Accounts under part 101 for public utilities and licensees, part 201 for natural gas companies and part 352 for oil pipeline companies.

37. The purpose of this rule is to establish uniform accounting requirements for the recognition of liabilities for legal obligations associated with the retirement of tangible long-lived assets. The accounting for removal costs that do not qualify as legal retirement obligations falls outside the scope of this rule. The Commission is aware that there is an ongoing discussion in the accounting community as to whether the cost of removal should be considered as a component of depreciation. However, this issue is beyond the scope of this rule and we are not convinced that there is a need to fundamentally change accounting concepts at this time.

38. Instead we will require jurisdictional entities to maintain separate subsidiary records for cost of removal for non-legal retirement obligations that are included as specific identifiable allowances recorded in accumulated depreciation in order to separately identify such information to facilitate external reporting and for regulatory analysis, and rate setting purposes. Therefore, the Commission is amending the instructions of accounts 108 and 110 in parts 101, 201 and account 31, Accrued depreciation—Carrier property, in part 352 to require jurisdictional entities to maintain separate subsidiary records for the purpose of identifying the amount of specific allowances collected in rates for non-legal retirement obligations included in the depreciation accruals.

39. Jurisdictional entities must identify and quantify in separate subsidiary records the amounts, if any, of previous and current accrued accumulated removal costs for other than legal retirement obligations recorded as part of the depreciation accrual in accounts 108 and 110 for public utilities and licensees, account 108 for natural gas companies, and account 31 for oil pipeline companies. If jurisdictional entities do not have the required records to separately identify such prior accruals for specific identifiable allowances collected in rates for non-legal asset retirement obligations recorded in accumulated depreciation, the Commission will require that the jurisdictional entities separately identify and quantify prospectively the amount of current accruals for specific allowances collected in rates for non-legal retirement obligations.

E. Accounts Established for Recording Accretion of Asset Retirement Obligations and Depreciation of Asset Retirement Costs

40. The Commission proposed to add a new income statement account entitled account 411.10, Accretion expense, in the Uniform Systems of Accounts in part 101 and part 201 to record the accretion of the liability for the asset retirement obligation. The Commission also proposed to add a new income statement account entitled account 403.1, Depreciation expense for asset retirement costs, in part 101 and part 201 to identify the depreciation expense recorded for capitalized asset retirement costs.

Comments Received

41. Certain commenters recommend that the Commission's proposed new account 411.10, Accretion expense, should be renumbered as either account 411.11 or an account number within the range of account 405, Amortization of other electric plant, through account 407, Amortization of property losses, unrecovered plant and regulatory study costs, which relate to the amortization of utility plant.

42. Two commenters suggest that the Commission renumber its proposed new account 403.1 because it is already being used in the Rural Utilities Service's (RUS) Uniform System of Accounts.³¹ The commenters suggest that the Commission use account 403.9 to accommodate the Uniform System of Accounts of RUS for its electric cooperatives.³²

Commission Response

43. The Commission will not renumber the chart of accounts. The accounting structure of the Uniform Systems of Accounts in part 101 and part 201 is designed to meet the accounting and reporting needs of this Commission. Users are permitted to adapt the Commission's Uniform Systems of Accounts for their own needs by allowing them to create new accounts and subaccounts. Such company generated accounts however, must be reconciled if and when the Commission subsequently determines to use that account number for its regulatory purposes. Therefore, jurisdictional entities must reconcile their account numbers accordingly, to

²⁷ See EEI at p. 3 and Southern at p. 2.

²⁸ See Deloitte & Touche at p. 2 and NASUCA at pp. 2–3.

²⁹ See NASUCA at pp. 15–17.

³⁰ See Definition 10 in 18 CFR part 101 (Public Utilities and Licensees), Definition 10 in 18 CFR part 201 (Natural Gas Companies), and Definition 12 in 18 CFR part 352 (Oil Pipeline Companies).

³¹ See RUS at p. 2 and NRECA at p. 6.

³² See Rural Utilities Service of the United States Department of Agriculture (RUS) Uniform System of Accounts, 7 CFR part 1767, Accounting Requirements for RUS Electric Borrowers.