

implement an automatic execution system for ETFs on a six-month pilot program basis.³ On December 20, 2001, June 17, 2002, December 30, 2002, and July 2, 2003, the pilot was extended for consecutive terms of six months.⁴ The Exchange now seeks to extend the pilot for an additional six months.

Since 1986, the Exchange has had an Auto-Ex feature for eligible orders in listed options. The Chicago Board Options Exchange, Philadelphia Stock Exchange, and Pacific Exchange established similar Auto-Ex features at about the same time as Amex, and the newest options exchange, the International Securities Exchange, also features automatic order execution. Auto-Ex, accordingly, has been a standard feature of the options markets for a number of years.

In 1993, Amex commenced trading Standard and Poor's Depositary Receipts ("SPDRs®"), the first ETF to be listed and traded on Amex. ETFs are individual securities that represent a fractional, undivided interest in a portfolio of securities. Currently, more than 100 ETFs are listed on Amex. Like an option, an ETF is a derivative security, and, according to Amex, its price is a function of the value of the portfolio of securities underlying the ETF. Thus, the Exchange asserts that, as is the case with options, it is not the price discovery market for ETFs, and that the price discovery market is the market or markets where the underlying securities trade.

The Exchange is now proposing to extend its current Auto-Ex technology for an additional six months to ETFs listed under Amex Rules 1002, 1002A, and 1202. Amex represents that this will continue to provide investors that send eligible orders to the Exchange with faster executions than they otherwise would receive. The Exchange believes that many investors desire rapid executions in trading securities that are priced derivatively since the value of the underlying instruments may fluctuate during order processing. Amex, moreover, will continue under the pilot extension to incorporate a price improvement algorithm into Auto-Ex for ETFs, which Amex expects will provide investors with better execution prices on their orders. The price

improvement algorithm works in the following manner:

When Amex establishes the National Best Bid or Offer ("NBBO"), Auto-Ex is programmed to execute eligible incoming ETF orders at the Amex Published Quote ("APQ") plus a programmable number of trading increments with respect to the Amex bid, and less a programmable number of trading increments in the case of the Amex offer.⁵ For example, if the APQ were 90.10 to 90.20, and the APQ constituted the NBBO, incoming sell orders might be automatically executed at 90.12 (the Amex bid plus two ticks) and incoming buy orders might be executed at 90.18 (the Amex offer less two ticks).

If Amex does not establish the NBBO, Auto-Ex is programmed to execute eligible incoming ETF orders at or better than the NBBO up to a specified number of trading increments relative to the APQ.⁶ Auto-Ex executes an eligible order at an improved price relative to the APQ unless such execution would result in a trade-through with respect to the price of an away market that is a participant in the Intermarket Trading System ("ITS").⁷ If a trade-through would result, the order is routed to the specialist for processing through the Amex electronic order book.

For example, assume that Auto-Ex is programmed to execute an order at the Amex bid plus two ticks. If the Amex bid were 90, and an away ITS market were bidding 90.01, an incoming sell order would be automatically executed on Amex at 90.02. Continuing with this example, if the away market were bidding 90.02, an incoming sell order would be automatically executed on Amex at 90.02 (matching the away market). If the away market were bidding 90.03, the incoming sell order

would not be automatically executed. Instead, it would be routed to the specialist for electronic processing through the Amex electronic order book.

The amount of price improvement that the system provides, both when Amex establishes the NBBO and when it does not, is determined by the Auto-Ex Enhancements Committee ("Committee") upon the request of a specialist and may differ among ETFs. The Committee consists of the Exchange's four Floor Governors and the Chairmen (or their designees) of the Specialists Association, Options Market Makers Association, and the Floor Brokers Association, respectively. The Exchange believes that the amount of price improvement will vary among securities based upon factors such as the width of the spread, the volatility of the underlying basket of securities underlying the ETF, and liquidity of available hedging vehicles. The amount of price improvement may be adjusted intra-day by the Committee.

As detailed in Amex Rule 128A, Auto-Ex for ETFs with price improvement is unavailable when the spread is at a specified minimum and maximum variation that may be adjusted security to security. The Committee determines, upon the request of a specialist, the minimum and maximum spreads at which Auto-Ex is unavailable. As further provided by Amex Rule 128A, Auto-Ex is also unavailable with respect to incoming sell orders when the Amex bid is for 100 shares, and similarly unavailable with respect to incoming buy orders when the Amex offer is for 100 shares.

Orders that are otherwise Auto-Ex eligible orders are also routed to the specialist, and not automatically executed, in situations where the specialist in conjunction with a Floor Governor or two Floor Officials determine that quotes are not reliable and the Exchange is experiencing communications or systems problems, "fast markets," or delays in the dissemination of quotes. Members and member organizations are notified when the Exchange has determined that quotes are not reliable prior to disengaging Auto-Ex.

Specialists and Registered Options Traders ("ROTs") that sign onto the system are automatically allocated the contra side of Auto-Ex trades for ETFs. Due to the automatic price improvement feature, the specialists and ROTs that sign onto Auto-Ex for ETFs are deemed to be on parity for purposes of allocating the contra side of ETF Auto-Ex trades. Amex Rule 128A incorporates the following methodology for the

³ See Securities Exchange Act Release No. 44449 (June 19, 2001), 66 FR 33724 (June 25, 2001) (approval of File No. SR-Amex-2001-29).

⁴ See Securities Exchange Act Release Nos. 45176, 66 FR 67582 (December 31, 2001); 46085, 67 FR 42836 (June 25, 2002); 47105, 68 FR 592 (January 6, 2003); and 48126, 68 FR 41189 (July 10, 2003) (notices of filing and immediate effectiveness of File Nos. SR-Amex-2001-105, SR-Amex-2002-42, SR-Amex-2002-99, and SR-Amex-2003-61, respectively).

⁵ The term "establish," as used in Amex Rule 128A, means that the APQ is currently at the NBBO, regardless of whether Amex was the first exchange to be at that price. See Securities Exchange Act Release No. 44449 (June 19, 2001), 66 FR 33724 (June 25, 2001).

⁶ Amex represents that once an order that is Auto-Ex eligible is sent to the Exchange, the person that initiated the order has no control over its execution. This is the case regardless of whether the order is executed by Auto-Ex or is executed by the specialist because Auto-Ex is unavailable. If the order is routed to the specialist for handling because Auto-Ex is unavailable, the specialist does not know if the order is for the account of a broker-dealer or for the account of a customer. This information is in the Exchange's order processing systems and is unavailable to the specialist.

⁷ The number of trading increments designated for price improvement when Amex establishes the NBBO may be different than the number of increments designated for price improvement when Amex does not establish the NBBO. See Securities Exchange Act Release No. 44449 (June 19, 2001), 66 FR 33724 (June 25, 2001).