



CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

April 8, 2008

H.R. 3548

Plain Language in Government Communications Act of 2007

*As ordered reported by the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
on March 13, 2008*

H.R. 3548 would amend federal law to require all federal agencies within one year to use plain language (clear and readily identifiable to the intended reader) in all documents, including letters, publications, and forms. The bill would encourage the use of plain language in federal data collection instruments and regulations. The legislation also would require the use of the English language to the maximum extent possible in all federal documents. Finally, H.R. 3548 would require each agency to designate a coordinator for its efforts to use plain language, review its compliance with the legislation, train employees to use plain language, and prepare reports to the Congress on compliance with the legislation.

CBO estimates that implementing H.R. 3548 would cost up to \$2 million a year for agencies to implement the additional employee training and reporting requirements, subject to the availability of appropriated funds. The bill could also affect direct spending by agencies not funded through annual appropriations, such as the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Bonneville Power Administration. CBO estimates, however, that any increase in spending by those agencies would not be significant.

Most provisions of the bill would codify and expand current practices of the federal government. Executive Order 12866 and the Presidential Memorandum on Plain Language (June 1, 1998) currently require government agencies to write in language that is comprehensible to readers. Based on information from the Office of Management and Budget, CBO estimates that implementing this bill would not significantly increase the cost of preparing various paper or electronic documents used throughout the government.

H.R. 3548 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act and would not affect the budgets of state, local, or tribal governments.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Matthew Pickford. This estimate was approved by Peter H. Fontaine, Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.