



CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

March 9, 2010

H.R. 946 **Plain Language Act of 2009**

*As ordered reported by the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
on March 4, 2010*

H.R. 946 would amend federal law to require all federal agencies within one year to use plain language (defined as language that is clear and readily identifiable to the intended reader) in all documents, including letters, publications, and forms. The legislation also would require the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to provide governmentwide guidance on this matter. Finally, H.R. 946 would require each agency to designate a coordinator for its efforts to use plain language, establish an agency Internet site related to those efforts, 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. 946 would cost about \$5 million a year for agencies to implement the additional employee training and reporting requirements, subject to 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; therefore, pay-as-you-go procedures would apply. CBO estimates, however, that any net increase in spending by those agencies would not be significant. Enacting the legislation would not affect revenues.

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 OMB, 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. 946 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.

On April 3, 2009, CBO transmitted a cost estimate for S. 574, the Plain Writing Act of 2009, as ordered reported by the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and

Governmental Affairs on April 1, 2009. Both pieces of legislation are similar in that they require federal agencies to use plain language in all documents, but H.R. 946 creates additional requirements on government agencies. CBO's cost estimates reflect those differences.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Matthew Pickford. This estimate was approved by Theresa Gullo, Deputy Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.