

# FASB Technical Bulletin No. 85-4

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## Accounting for Purchases of Life Insurance

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**Financial Accounting Standards Board**  
of the Financial Accounting Foundation  
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## FTB 85-4: Accounting for Purchases of Life Insurance

### References:

AICPA Accounting Interpretation, "Accounting for Key-Man Life Insurance"  
FASB Concepts Statement No. 3, *Elements of Financial Statements of Business Enterprises*, paragraphs 19 and 123

### Question

1. How should an entity<sup>1</sup> account for an investment in life insurance?

### Response

2. The amount that could be realized under the insurance contract as of the date of the statement of financial position should be reported as an asset. The change in cash surrender or contract value during the period is an adjustment of premiums paid in determining the expense or income to be recognized under the contract for the period.

### Effective Date and Transition

3. The provisions of this Technical Bulletin are effective for insurance policies acquired after November 14, 1985.

## Appendix

### Background

4. In November 1970, the AICPA issued an Accounting Interpretation entitled "Accounting for Key-Man Life Insurance." That Accounting Interpretation identified the cash surrender value method as generally accepted accounting for purchases of life insurance. New types of life insurance contracts, new provisions in traditional contracts, and changes in the insurance industry have led some to question the 1970 Accounting Interpretation. In October 1984, the AICPA's Accounting Standards Executive Committee (AcSEC) approved an Issues Paper entitled "Accounting for Key-Person Life Insurance." In the Issues Paper, AcSEC reaffirmed support of the cash surrender value method as the only generally accepted method. The AcSEC position differed from the position of the AICPA Insurance Companies Committee, which supported use of a different method in certain circumstances. AcSEC was concerned that diversity would develop in practice because of the difference between those positions and requested that the FASB consider the matter.

5. A premium paid by a purchaser of life insurance serves a variety of purposes. A portion of the premium pays the insurer for assumption of mortality risk and provides for recovery of the insurer's contract acquisition, initiation, and maintenance costs. Another portion of the premium contributes to the accumulation of contract values. The relative amounts of premium payment credited to various contract attributes change over time as the age of the insured party increases and as earnings are credited to previously established contract values.

6. An insurance contract is significantly different from most investment agreements. The various attributes of the policy could be obtained separately through term insurance and purchase of investment. The combination of benefits and contract values could not, however, typically be acquired absent the insurance contract. Continued protection from mortality risk and realization of scheduled increases in contract accumulation usually requires payment of future premiums.

7. The payment of insurance premiums may take a number of different forms. The insurance contract may be purchased through payment of a single premium, as opposed to the typical series of future premiums. Alternatively, the premium payments may be made through loans from the insurance company that are secured by policy cash surrender values. The pattern of premium payments is a decision that does not alter the underlying nature of the insurance contract.

### Consideration of Comments Received on Proposed Technical Bulletin

8. A proposed Technical Bulletin, *Accounting for Business-Owned Life Insurance*, was released for comment on June 28, 1985. Forty-seven letters of comment were received on the proposed Technical Bulletin. Certain of the comments received and consideration of them are discussed in the following paragraphs.

9. Some respondents view the dominant objective of a life insurance contract to be investment. Subject to certain criteria evidencing an intent to continue the contract, they maintain that the contract meets the definition of an asset established in paragraph 19 of Concepts Statement 3, which states, "Assets are probable future economic benefits obtained or controlled by a particular entity as a result of past transactions or events" (footnote reference omitted). Those who hold this view suggested that such contracts should be accounted for using methods that result in reporting the investment in life insurance at amounts different from those stipulated in the contract.

10. This Technical Bulletin does not take that view. The current capacity to realize contract benefits is limited to settlement amounts specified in the contract. Additional amounts in excess of cash surrender value, which would be reported as assets under the various alternative accounting methods suggested, are created by future events, which typically include premium payments and earnings credited to contract amounts.

11. Paragraph 123 of Concepts Statement 3 discusses the occurrence of past events and the role of future events in the recognition of assets.

Since the transaction or event giving rise to the enterprise's right to the future economic benefit must already have occurred, the definition excludes from assets items that may in the future become an enterprise's assets but have not yet become its assets. An enterprise has no asset for a particular future economic benefit if the transactions or events that give it access to and control of the benefit are yet in the future.

12. Some respondents asserted that reporting an insurance investment at its realizable value represents an accounting based on liquidation values. Those respondents suggested that the entity acquiring an insurance contract is, in many cases, economically or contractually committed to maintain the contract in force. They maintained that such a commitment virtually assures that benefits in excess of premiums paid would be realized and that the policy should be reported on a basis other than its cash surrender value.

13. This Technical Bulletin does not accept that view. The amount realizable under an insurance investment represents settlement values agreed to by an independent buyer and seller. The variety of yields and contract accumulation patterns available in the insurance marketplace provides the buyer and seller a variety of insurance and settlement options. There is no compelling justification to depart from the recording of such contracts based on agreed provisions. The commitment referred to by respondents is, in the staff's view, a commitment to ensure that assets are available to meet contractual obligations. The presence of such a commitment does not change the measurement of the asset that is expected to satisfy the obligation.

14. Some respondents asserted that policy features, most notably the business exchange rider, were significant factors in determining the proper accounting for the policy. The business exchange rider allows a company to use values in an existing policy to insure a different employee when the originally insured employee leaves the company. They maintain that this feature gives the employer the ability to transfer the contract freely and enhances the employer's ability to realized the future value of the investment. They further maintain that the increased probability of realizing future values should lead to the reporting of amounts in excess of cash surrender value.

15. This Technical Bulletin rejects that view. The business exchange rider is a significant development in the design of business insurance products and reduces additional policy costs if a covered employee leaves the company. Such a provision does not affect the realization of future benefits under the insurance contract, nor does it change the traditional underwriting decisions involved in insuring a new life. Instead, the provision only reduces the cost of obtaining those benefits by allowing a new employee to be insured without the costs that are typically associated with obtaining a new policy.

The Financial Accounting Standards Board has authorized its staff to prepare FASB Technical Bulletins to provide guidance on certain financial accounting and reporting problems on a timely basis, pursuant to the procedures described in FASB Technical Bulletin No. 79-1 (Revised), *Purpose and Scope of FASB Technical Bulletins and Procedures for Issuance*. The provisions of Technical Bulletins need not be applied to immaterial items.

## Footnotes

FTB85-4, Footnote 1--The provisions of this Technical Bulletin apply to all entities that purchase life insurance in which the entity is either the owner or beneficiary of the contract, without regard to the funding objective of the purchase. Such purchases would typically include those intended to meet loan covenants or to fund deferred compensation agreements, buy-sell agreements, or postemployment death benefits. Purchases of life insurance by retirement plans that are subject to FASB Statement No. 35, *Accounting and Reporting by Defined Benefit Pension Plans*, are not addressed by this Technical Bulletin.