

PART R - ANTITRUST OFFENSES**§2R1.1. Bid-Rigging, Price-Fixing or Market-Allocation Agreements Among Competitors**

- (a) Base Offense Level: **12**
- (b) Specific Offense Characteristics
- (1) If the conduct involved participation in an agreement to submit non-competitive bids, increase by **1** level.
- (2) If the volume of commerce attributable to the defendant was more than \$1,000,000, adjust the offense level as follows:

| <u>Volume of Commerce</u> (Apply the Greatest) | <u>Adjustment to Offense Level</u> |
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| (A) More than \$1,000,000 | add 2 |
| (B) More than \$10,000,000 | add 4 |
| (C) More than \$50,000,000 | add 6 |
| (D) More than \$100,000,000 | add 8 |
| (E) More than \$300,000,000 | add 10 |
| (F) More than \$600,000,000 | add 12 |
| (G) More than \$1,200,000,000 | add 14 |
| (H) More than \$1,850,000,000 | add 16 . |

For purposes of this guideline, the volume of commerce attributable to an individual participant in a conspiracy is the volume of commerce done by him or his principal in goods or services that were affected by the violation. When multiple counts or conspiracies are involved, the volume of commerce should be treated cumulatively to determine a single, combined offense level.

- (c) Special Instruction for Fines
- (1) For an individual, the guideline fine range shall be from one to five percent of the volume of commerce, but not less than \$20,000.
- (d) Special Instructions for Fines - Organizations
- (1) In lieu of the pecuniary loss under subsection (a)(3) of §8C2.4 (Base Fine), use 20 percent of the volume of affected commerce.
- (2) When applying §8C2.6 (Minimum and Maximum Multipliers), neither the minimum nor maximum multiplier shall be less than 0.75.
- (3) In a bid-rigging case in which the organization submitted one or more complementary bids, use as the organization's volume of commerce the greater of (A) the volume of commerce done by the organization in the goods or services that were affected by the violation, or (B) the largest contract on

which the organization submitted a complementary bid in connection with the bid-rigging conspiracy.

Commentary

Statutory Provisions: 15 U.S.C. §§ 1, 3(b). For additional statutory provision(s), see Appendix A (Statutory Index).

Application Notes:

1. Application of Chapter Three (Adjustments).—Sections 3B1.1 (Aggravating Role), 3B1.2 (Mitigating Role), 3B1.3 (Abuse of Position of Trust or Use of Special Skill), and 3C1.1 (Obstructing or Impeding the Administration of Justice) may be relevant in determining the seriousness of the defendant's offense. For example, if a sales manager organizes or leads the price-fixing activity of five or more participants, the 4-level increase at §3B1.1(a) should be applied to reflect the defendant's aggravated role in the offense. For purposes of applying §3B1.2, an individual defendant should be considered for a mitigating role adjustment only if he were responsible in some minor way for his firm's participation in the conspiracy.
2. Considerations in Setting Fine for Individuals.—In setting the fine for individuals, the court should consider the extent of the defendant's participation in the offense, the defendant's role, and the degree to which the defendant personally profited from the offense (including salary, bonuses, and career enhancement). If the court concludes that the defendant lacks the ability to pay the guideline fine, it should impose community service in lieu of a portion of the fine. The community service should be equally as burdensome as a fine.
3. The fine for an organization is determined by applying Chapter Eight (Sentencing of Organizations). In selecting a fine for an organization within the guideline fine range, the court should consider both the gain to the organization from the offense and the loss caused by the organization. It is estimated that the average gain from price-fixing is 10 percent of the selling price. The loss from price-fixing exceeds the gain because, among other things, injury is inflicted upon consumers who are unable or for other reasons do not buy the product at the higher prices. Because the loss from price-fixing exceeds the gain, subsection (d)(1) provides that 20 percent of the volume of affected commerce is to be used in lieu of the pecuniary loss under §8C2.4(a)(3). The purpose for specifying a percent of the volume of commerce is to avoid the time and expense that would be required for the court to determine the actual gain or loss. In cases in which the actual monopoly overcharge appears to be either substantially more or substantially less than 10 percent, this factor should be considered in setting the fine within the guideline fine range.
4. Another consideration in setting the fine is that the average level of mark-up due to price-fixing may tend to decline with the volume of commerce involved.
5. It is the intent of the Commission that alternatives such as community confinement not be used to avoid imprisonment of antitrust offenders.
6. Understatement of seriousness is especially likely in cases involving complementary bids. If, for example, the defendant participated in an agreement not to submit a bid, or to submit an unreasonably high bid, on one occasion, in exchange for his being allowed to win a subsequent

bid that he did not in fact win, his volume of commerce would be zero, although he would have contributed to harm that possibly was quite substantial. The court should consider sentences near the top of the guideline range in such cases.

7. *In the case of a defendant with previous antitrust convictions, a sentence at the maximum of the applicable guideline range, or an upward departure, may be warranted. See §4A1.3 (Adequacy of Criminal History Category).*

Background: These guidelines apply to violations of the antitrust laws. Although they are not unlawful in all countries, there is near universal agreement that restrictive agreements among competitors, such as horizontal price-fixing (including bid-rigging) and horizontal market-allocation, can cause serious economic harm. There is no consensus, however, about the harmfulness of other types of antitrust offenses, which furthermore are rarely prosecuted and may involve unsettled issues of law. Consequently, only one guideline, which deals with horizontal agreements in restraint of trade, has been promulgated.

The agreements among competitors covered by this section are almost invariably covert conspiracies that are intended to, and serve no purpose other than to, restrict output and raise prices, and that are so plainly anticompetitive that they have been recognized as illegal per se, i.e., without any inquiry in individual cases as to their actual competitive effect.

Under the guidelines, prison terms for these offenders should be much more common, and usually somewhat longer, than typical under pre-guidelines practice. Absent adjustments, the guidelines require some period of confinement in the great majority of cases that are prosecuted, including all bid-rigging cases. The court will have the discretion to impose considerably longer sentences within the guideline ranges. Adjustments from Chapter Three, Part E (Acceptance of Responsibility) and, in rare instances, Chapter Three, Part B (Role in the Offense), may decrease these minimum sentences; nonetheless, in very few cases will the guidelines not require that some confinement be imposed. Adjustments will not affect the level of fines.

Tying the offense level to the scale or scope of the offense is important in order to ensure that the sanction is in fact punitive and that there is an incentive to desist from a violation once it has begun. The offense levels are not based directly on the damage caused or profit made by the defendant because damages are difficult and time consuming to establish. The volume of commerce is an acceptable and more readily measurable substitute. The limited empirical data available as to pre-guidelines practice showed that fines increased with the volume of commerce and the term of imprisonment probably did as well.

The Commission believes that the volume of commerce is liable to be an understated measure of seriousness in some bid-rigging cases. For this reason, and consistent with pre-guidelines practice, the Commission has specified a 1-level increase for bid-rigging.

Substantial fines are an essential part of the sentence. For an individual, the guideline fine range is from one to five percent of the volume of commerce, but not less than \$20,000. For an organization, the guideline fine range is determined under Chapter Eight (Sentencing of Organizations), but pursuant to subsection (d)(2), the minimum multiplier is at least 0.75. This multiplier, which requires a minimum fine of 15 percent of the volume of commerce for the least serious case, was selected to provide an effective deterrent to antitrust offenses. At the same time, this minimum multiplier maintains incentives for desired organizational behavior. Because the Department of Justice has a well-established amnesty program for organizations that self-report

antitrust offenses, no lower minimum multiplier is needed as an incentive for self-reporting. A minimum multiplier of at least 0.75 ensures that fines imposed in antitrust cases will exceed the average monopoly overcharge.

The Commission believes that most antitrust defendants have the resources and earning capacity to pay the fines called for by this guideline, at least over time on an installment basis.

Historical Note: Effective November 1, 1987. Amended effective November 1, 1989 (see Appendix C, amendments 211 and 303); November 1, 1991 (see Appendix C, amendments 377 and 422); November 1, 2003 (see Appendix C, amendment 661); November 1, 2004 (see Appendix C, amendment 674); November 1, 2005 (see Appendix C, amendment 678); November 1, 2015 (see Appendix C, amendment 791).