FROM THE DESK OF

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Longevity of Railroad Retirement Beneficiaries

Every three years, the Railroad Retirement Board's Chief Actuary conducts a study of the longevity of its annuitants, as part of a valuation of future revenues and benefit payments. The following questions and answers summarize the results of the most recent longevity study.

1. What were the study's findings on the life expectancy of retired male railroaders?

The most recent data reflected a continued improvement in longevity. Using data through 2009, the study indicated that, on the average, a male railroader retiring at age 60 can be expected to live another 21.9 years, or approximately 263 months. Studies done three, six and nine years ago indicated life expectancies of 21.3, 20.7 and 20.1 years, respectively, for this category of beneficiary. The study also indicated that a male railroader retiring at age 62 can be expected to live another 20.1 years (241 months), while the previous three studies indicated life expectancies of 19.6, 19, and 18.5 years, respectively. A male railroader retiring at age 65 can be expected to live another 17.7 years (approximately 212 months). The previous studies indicated life expectancies of 17.1, 16.6, and 16.1 years, respectively, for this category of beneficiary.

2. How did these life expectancy figures compare to those of disabled annuitants?

As would be expected, disabled annuitants have a shorter average life expectancy, but the difference decreases with age. At age 60, a disabled railroader has an average life expectancy of 17.2 years, or 4.7 years less than a nondisabled male annuitant of the same age; at age 65, a disabled annuitant has an average life expectancy of 3.6 years less than a nondisabled 65-year-old annuitant; and at age 70 the difference is only 2.8 years.

3. Are women still living longer than men?

In general, women still live longer than men. This is shown both in the Railroad Retirement Board's life expectancy studies of male and female annuitants and by other studies of the general United States population.

For example, at age 60 a retired female railroader is expected on the average to live 25.1 years, 3.2 years longer than a retired male railroader of the same age; and at age 65, a retired female railroader is expected on the average to live 20.5 years, 2.8 years longer than her male counterpart. Spouses and widows age 65 have average life expectancies of 20.7 years and 18.7 years, respectively.

(More)

4. Can individuals use life expectancy figures to predict how long they will live?

Life expectancy figures are averages for large groups of people. Any particular individual's lifetime may be much longer or shorter than the life expectancy of his or her age and group.

According to the study, from a group of 1,000 retired male employees at age 65, 927 will live at least 5 years, 809 at least 10 years, 631 at least 15 years, and 414 at least 20 years. Of female age annuitants at age 65, 560 will be alive 20 years later.

5. How do the life expectancies of railroad retirement annuitants compare with those of the general population?

While exact data were not available for direct comparison, data available to the Railroad Retirement Board did not indicate significant differences, except for 60-year old annuitants. Male and female railroaders retiring at age 60 can be expected to live 1 and 1.2 years longer, respectively, than those in the equivalent category of the general population.

The entire longevity study is available on the agency's website at www.rrb.gov.

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