

USING CRU-X TO CAPTURE OFFICIAL TIME SPENT ON REPRESENTATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Federal Aviation Administration

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**U.S. Department of
Transportation**


Office of the Secretary
of Transportation

Office of Inspector General

Memorandum

Subject: **ACTION:** Using CRU-X to
Capture Official Time Spent on
Representational Activities
Report No. AV-2004-033

Date: February 10, 2004

From: Alexis M. Stefani 
Principal Assistant Inspector General
for Auditing and Evaluation

Reply to
Attn of: JA-10:x60500

To: Federal Aviation Administrator

This memorandum is to bring to your attention several observations we have regarding official time granted for union representational activities as reported by the Department of Transportation (DOT) in a recent Government-wide survey by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). As reported by OPM, DOT granted over 612,000 hours (the equivalent of 294 staff-years) of official time in fiscal year (FY) 2002 for representational activities. Ninety eight percent of the hours granted were attributable to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and the vast majority of those hours were within what is now the Air Traffic Organization.

The amount of time DOT granted (which was primarily time granted by FAA) stands out in comparison with all other agencies. For example, the Department of Defense, which has 10 times the number of bargaining unit employees, granted only about twice the amount of time granted by DOT. However, the hours FAA reported include time granted for traditional representational activities (such as negotiating agreements), as well as time granted for bargaining unit employees to work on FAA work groups (such as task forces for developing new equipment). About half of the 612,000 hours reported were for traditional representational activities and the remaining hours were for time spent by bargaining unit employees working on work groups.

The time spent on work groups can be further stratified between time spent pursuant to collective bargaining agreements and time spent pursuant to management's request. However, FAA does not differentiate between the two. As a result, the Agency reports all time spent by bargaining unit employees working on work groups as official time granted for representational activities.

While FAA's methodology ensures that all time granted as a result of collective bargaining requirements is reported, it presents an inaccurate picture of the Agency's workforce activities and may preclude meaningful comparisons to other Government agencies.

The lack of accurate data on official time reinforces the need for the Air Traffic Organization to have a labor distribution system for capturing and reporting various metrics concerning the activities of its workforce. FAA's planned labor distribution system (CRU-X) could be used to more accurately capture data on official time by designating different codes for: (1) time spent on representational activities; (2) time spent on work groups pursuant to collective bargaining requirements; and (3) time spent on work groups at management's request. We recommend that FAA designate these different activities within CRU-X to ensure official time, as reported, accurately reflects the activities of FAA's workforce.

CRU-X is not yet operating as originally designed, and we have significant concerns about a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between FAA and the controllers' union that severely limits the system's ability to track workforce data. We understand that FAA and the union re-opened the CRU-X MOU in September 2003 and that FAA has briefed the union on substantive changes planned for the system. FAA expects to begin discussions with the union regarding CRU-X later this month. In our opinion, FAA and the union need to take the necessary steps to ensure that the internal controls for CRU-X are implemented as originally intended.

OBSERVATIONS

This review was conducted as part of our general oversight responsibility of FAA. The purpose was to bring to FAA's attention several observations we had regarding official time granted for union representational activities as reported by DOT in a recent Government-wide survey by OPM. The scope and methodology we used in conducting this review are included as an exhibit at the end of this memorandum.

In June 2003, OPM issued a summary report at the request of the House Committee on Appropriations, comparing official time granted for representational activities among all Federal agencies during FY 2002. Official time is generally defined as authorized, paid time off from assigned Government duties to represent a union or its bargaining unit employees.

In the OPM summary report, DOT reported granting 612,397 hours of official time to represent 44,190 bargaining unit employees, which is the equivalent of 294 staff-years. Ninety eight percent (600,494 hours) of the 612,397 hours were granted by the FAA, and the vast majority of those hours were within what is now the Air Traffic Organization. There are several salient statistics regarding the amount of official time reported by DOT (which was primarily time granted by FAA) that stand out as compared to the amount of official time granted by other Federal agencies. For example:

- The Department of Defense, which has 10 times the number of bargaining unit employees, granted only about twice the amount of time granted by DOT.
- DOT had the largest increase in time granted as compared to 1998, going from 193,728 hours in 1998 to 612,397 in 2002 (an increase of more than 200 percent).
- The estimated total cost of the time DOT granted was \$22.5 million, which was the second highest in the Government behind only the Department of Defense (with a total estimated cost of \$29.2 million).
- The amount of time DOT granted in FY 2002 was the equivalent of 13.86 hours per bargaining unit employee, which is three times the Government-wide average of 4.21 hours.

On the surface, these metrics appear problematic as compared to other agencies. However, in reporting official time, FAA includes both time granted for traditional representational activities (such as time spent as a facility representative) as well as time granted for bargaining unit employees to work on FAA task forces and/or work groups. These include work groups for fielding new air traffic systems and projects such as airspace redesign.

Of the approximately 612,000 hours granted, about half were for traditional representational activities, and the remaining half were for time spent by bargaining unit employees working on FAA work groups. The time spent by collective bargaining employees working on FAA work groups can be further stratified between time spent pursuant to collective bargaining agreements and time spent pursuant to management's request. For example, FAA management routinely requests that controllers from the bargaining unit assist in redesigning the National Airspace System. In those cases, the time spent by the bargaining unit employee is at the request of management and may not be related to union representational issues.

However, FAA does not differentiate whether the time spent on work groups is a result of collective bargaining requirements or at the request of management. As a result, FAA reports all time spent by bargaining unit employees working on task forces and/or work groups as official time granted. By including both categories, FAA's report may exceed OPM's definition of official time granted for representational activities.

While FAA's methodology ensures that all time granted as a result of collective bargaining requirements is reported, it presents an inaccurate picture of the Agency's workforce activities and may preclude meaningful comparisons to other Government agencies.

The lack of accurate data regarding official time for representational activities reinforces the need for the Air Traffic Organization to have an accurate labor distribution system for capturing and reporting various metrics on its workforce. As we reported in our June 2003 assessment of FAA's cost accounting system, FAA is planning on implementing a labor distribution system called CRU-X for the Air Traffic Organization. CRU-X could be used for more accurately capturing data on official time by designating different codes for: (1) time spent on representational activities; (2) time spent on work groups pursuant to collective bargaining requirements; and (3) time spent on work groups pursuant to management's request. Stratifying between those categories is important because of the large amount of time being reported by FAA as official time granted for representational activities (the equivalent of 294 staff-years).

In September 2002, however, FAA management entered into an agreement that limited CRU-X's ability to track employee activities. Specifically, the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between FAA and the controllers' union eliminated key internal control functions such as requiring employees to sign in and out of the system when arriving or leaving work or tracking time spent by employees performing collateral duties. In our assessment, we cited the lack of those fundamental procedures as a serious internal control weakness and recommended that FAA implement satisfactory internal controls for CRU-X, including requirements to capture time worked by employees on collateral duties.

FAA and the controllers' union re-opened the CRU-X MOU in September 2003, and in January 2004, FAA briefed the union on substantive changes planned for the system. FAA expects to begin discussions with the union regarding CRU-X later this month. In our opinion, FAA and the union need to take the necessary steps to ensure that the internal controls for CRU-X are implemented as originally intended.

RECOMMENDATION

To ensure that official time granted for representational activities is accurately reported, we recommend that FAA designate different codes within CRU-X for capturing time spent on: (a) representational activities; (b) work groups pursuant to collective bargaining requirements; and (c) work groups pursuant to management's request.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

We provided a draft copy of this report to Agency officials on January 29, 2004, to obtain their views and comments. In general, those officials agreed with the facts as presented in this report, our conclusions, and our recommendation.

In accordance with Department of Transportation Order 8000.1C, we would appreciate receiving your formal written comments within 15 calendar days. If you concur with the recommendation, please indicate the specific actions taken or planned and the target dates for action. If you do not concur, please provide an explanation of your position. We welcome any alternative courses of action that could resolve the issues.

We appreciate the cooperation and assistance provided by you and your staff during our review. If you have any questions or need further information, please feel free to contact me at (202) 366-1992, or David Dobbs, Assistant Inspector General for Aviation at (202) 366-0500.

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cc: FAA Deputy Administrator
Air Traffic Chief Operating Officer
FAA Chief of Staff

EXHIBIT. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this review was to bring to FAA's attention several observations we had regarding official time granted for union representational activities as reported by DOT in a recent Government-wide survey by the Office of Personnel Management.

We conducted this review in accordance with Government Auditing Standards prescribed by the Comptroller General of the United States, and included such tests as we considered necessary to provide reasonable assurance of detecting abuse or illegal acts.

We conducted the review between January and February 2004. To evaluate official time reported by FAA, we obtained and reviewed the Office of Personnel Management summary report of official time use for FY 2002 and calculated various metrics comparing the hours granted by DOT to other Federal agencies as reported by OPM. We also obtained and analyzed the supporting documentation provided to OPM by DOT, including the supporting documentation provided to DOT by FAA. We interviewed officials from FAA labor relations to gain an understanding of what activities FAA included in the hours reported for representational activities. We also interviewed program managers responsible for CRU-X to determine if the system could be programmed to identify and track various categories of official time granted. Lastly, we provided a draft copy of this report to FAA officials for their review and to obtain their comments.