

**ARS CSREES ERS NASS**

*Bulletin*

**Title:** Paying for Travel Expenses

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**Originating Office:** Travel and Relocation Services Branch, Financial Management  
Division, AFM/ARS

**Distribution:** All REE Employees

This bulletin reminds REE employees of the approved methods of payment for Official travel expenses.

## **Background:**

Several regulations govern the method of payment used for Official travel expenses. In general, Official travel expenses must be paid using a Government-issued travel card to the extent possible. This is a Congressional requirement as outlined in the Travel and Transportation Reform Act of 1998, Public Law 105–264, and codified in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), under 41 CFR 301.

The Government designed the travel card program to minimize the need for agencies to provide cash advances to employees when traveling and as a convenient means for employees to pay for travel expenses. The travel card vendors also provide rebates to Federal agencies using the travel card program. Therefore, if the travel card is not used, the Government does not recoup their rebates.

Knowingly avoiding the use of the card is a violation of regulation and Government ethics. Using a personal card for travel expenses to increase personal travel program benefits when the use of a Government travel card is mandated violates the Government Employees Standard of Conduct which states, “Public service is a public trust, requiring employees to place loyalty to laws and ethical principles above private gain.”

## **Policy:**

REE employees are required to use their individually billed travel charge card to procure transportation tickets, lodging, meals to the extent possible, and rental vehicles. Use of a personal charge card or cash to pay for Official travel expenses is prohibited in most cases.

- Employees must always pay for Common Carrier (airline, train, bus) tickets using a travel charge card, either an individually billed or centrally billed account. At no time may an employee use cash or a personal credit card to pay for Common Carrier tickets. Any exemption from this requirement must be granted by the REE Chief Financial Officer in writing, and with proper justification.
- Employees must use the travel charge card for meals unless the use is impractical.
- Employees may only use their travel card to pay for their own Official travel expenses. Employees may not use their travel card to guarantee room reservations for others, to pay for group meals, or to pay for expenses of non-government persons.
- The travel card is used to pay only for reimbursable Official travel expenses. Any personal expenses for which employees are not eligible for reimbursement may not be paid with the travel charge card.
- ATM withdrawals must be made in accordance with REE policy, which limits such withdrawals to \$350 per week, or \$50 per day of travel, whichever is less.

- Employees are to promptly voucher for reimbursable travel expenses.
- Employees are reminded to abide by the requirements of the Department of Agriculture (USDA) travel card program as outlined in REE Bulletin 07-301, *Use and Management of the Travel Charge Card*, dated December 13, 2006. This bulletin is found at: <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ppweb/Bulletins/07-301.pdf>.

USDA has a “Zero Tolerance Policy” pertaining to the use of the Government travel charge card. Not using the card when it is required by regulation and USDA/REE policy is considered a misuse of the travel card program and may be subject to disciplinary action. Just as employees must refrain from using the card for certain expenses, they must also use the card when required.

Questions on the travel card program may be addressed to the Travel and Relocation Services Branch on 301-504-1260.

/s/

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