

## **Retirees living in Germany can benefit from new arrangements reached with German Federal Ministry of Finance**

**MANNHEIM, Germany** -- Retired servicemembers who live in Germany as ordinary residents can benefit from new arrangements with the German government regarding duties charged on purchases made in American military exchange and commissary facilities and packages received through U.S. forces post offices.

The arrangements, which took effect Nov. 1, put into law benefits which previously had been agreed to but for which no law existed, said Rula Strumpfen with the U.S. Army Europe Office of the Provost Marshal Host Nation Customs Policy Branch.

“The concession, meaning the authorization for retired military personnel to shop at U.S. forces sales facilities -- which applies also to surviving dependents, retired reservists, 100 percent disabled veterans and unaccompanied dependents whose sponsor is serving in a restricted tour area -- granted by the German Federal Ministry of Finance Customs Department during the past 50 years now has the force of law,” Strumpfen said. “This is a great benefit,” she added. “The ruling applies not only to U.S. personnel, but also to the personnel of the other Sending States Forces in Germany.”

In 1964, Strumpfen explained, the German FMOF Customs Department granted an exception to retired military personnel who live in Germany or who visit Germany for at least 30 days but are not covered by the Status of Forces Agreement and Supplementary Agreement for Germany. The exception allowed them and their accompanying dependents to shop in Army and Air Force Exchange Service and Defense Commissary Agency facilities. However, because of the European Community Customs Code, this ruling was always subject to revocation, she added.

The new Forces Customs Ordinance codifies that privilege and allows retirees to shop for non-rationed items in AAFES and DECA facilities in Germany, and pay German Customs a flat rate of duty of 17.5 percent for goods that cost less than the equivalent of 50 euro per item, Strumpfen said. For purchases of items with a single-item sales price of the equivalent of 50 euro and more, German Customs will apply the 19 percent value-added-tax plus the customs tariff for the item. German Customs personnel will determine what the final rate will be, Strumpfen explained.

Web sites are available to help retirees determine their duty rates. A list of the tariff rates used to determine duty rates for specific items in English can be found at [www.zolltarifnummern.de](http://www.zolltarifnummern.de) and in German at [www.ezt-online.de](http://www.ezt-online.de). The euro rate German Customs uses to calculate the value of items is available at [www.zoll.de](http://www.zoll.de). German Customs will use the euro rate applicable for the month the purchases were made.

Retirees must still report purchases monthly to local German Customs offices and register annually with U.S. Forces Customs-Europe offices, stressed Bill Johnson, director of the

USAREUR OPM Customs Executive Agency. They cannot shop unless they have been issued the so-called “pink card” by a German Customs office.

Another benefit for retirees is that the German FMOF Customs Department agreed they can use the U.S. forces postal system and receive packages in Germany up to a value equivalent to 22 euro without paying taxes or duties, Strumpen said. She added that efforts are currently ongoing with the FMOF Customs Department to work out procedures for declaring parcels to German Customs authorities. The 16 oz. Department of Defense-mandated weight restriction when using the U.S. forces postal system has not changed, Johnson added.

“Our job is to facilitate procedures to support U.S. personnel,” Strumpen said. The German FMOF Customs Department has been willing to come to these arrangements because they appreciate the continuing partnership with the USAREUR Provost Marshal as the Customs Executive Agent for the U.S. forces, she said, adding that this is also proven by the fact that Germany is the only European Union member state that grants customs benefits to U.S. retirees codified by statute.

Johnson said USAREUR customs officials take part in community retiree open houses and pre-retirement briefings to help educate U.S. personnel about customs policies and procedures. He also recommended that retirees who have questions visit their local retirement services or military customs offices.



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