



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Office of the Chief Financial Officer
Finance Office

MEMORANDUM FOR: All NOAA Employees

FROM: Kim Darling *Kim Darling*
Acting Director Finance Office/Comptroller

SUBJECT: Travel Advisory 12-3
Guidance on Premium Class Travel

Effective Date: July 2, 2012

Purpose. This Travel Advisory is being issued to restrict the use of premium class travel accommodations. To ensure the prudent use of limited Government resources, the Department has established higher levels of approval for all premium class travel (otherwise known as 'other than coach class travel'), which includes business and first class travel. In addition, the Department is now requiring additional justifications when using either the '14-hour rule' or 'agency mission'.

Delegation. Effective June 15, 2012, NOAA's Deputy Under Secretary (DUS) is the only authorizing official who can approve premium class travel accommodations. Government wide policy requires that economy/coach-class accommodations be used for all official temporary duty (TDY) travel unless premium class travel accommodations can be properly justified and approved. The use of premium class travel must always be the exception and limited to cases where travel cannot be accomplished using coach class travel.

Approval. All premium class travel (air, train, ship) requests must be submitted to NOAA's DUS via Form CD-334, "Request for Approval of Extra Fare Accommodations", and accompanied by the travel authorization. The CD-334 must be filled out in its entirety or the request will be rejected. Once the CD-334 is approved, a copy of the approved CD-334 must be sent to ADTRAV for ticketing.

Current Federal Travel Regulation (FTR). The FTR allows premium class travel accommodations to be approved under one of the following exceptions.

First class travel accommodations may be approved only if:

- (1) No coach-class accommodations are reasonably available; or
- (2) It accommodates a medical disability or other special need; or
- (3) Exceptional security circumstances require such use; or
- (4) Required because of agency mission (**note ‘Policy Change b’ below**).

Business class travel accommodations may be approved only if:

- (1) It accommodates a medical disability or other special need; or
- (2) Exceptional security circumstances require such use; or
- (3) Coach-class accommodations do not provide adequate sanitation or health standards;
- (4) Regularly scheduled flights between origin/destination points (including connecting points) provide only premium class service; or
- (5) Transportation costs are paid in full by a non-Federal source in accordance with FTR, Chapter 304; or
- (6) It’s authorized in accordance with the 14 hour rule (**note ‘Policy Change a’ below**) where the origin and/or destination are outside the continental United States (OCONUS), and the scheduled flight time, including stopovers and change of planes, is in excess of 14 hours; or
- (7) The use results in an overall cost savings to the Government by avoiding additional subsistence costs, overtime, or lost productive time while awaiting coach-class accommodations; or
- (8) No space is available in coach-class accommodations in time to accomplish the mission, which is urgent and cannot be postponed; or
- (9) Required because of agency mission (**note ‘Policy Change b’ below**).

Policy Change.

a) 14-Hour Rule. The “length of flight” in and of itself is no longer a sufficient justification to authorize business class under the 14-hour rule. In nearly all cases, the payment of an extra day of per diem will be more cost effective than premium class travel accommodations. Therefore, in all cases that qualify under the 14-hour rule, coach class accommodations must be used and travel must be arranged for the employee to:

- (1) Travel to the TDY site: Commence travel early enough to provide a rest stop en route or upon arrival at the official TDY site; and
- (2) Return to the official duty station (ODS): Take advantage of a rest stop en route to their ODS or be granted an excused absence upon arrival at their ODS.

However, in cases where the cost of a rest stop is more expensive than the cost of authorizing premium class travel accommodations, the employee must provide a cost analysis along with support documentation (ADTRAV itineraries) as part of the CD-334.

In extremely rare cases where the employee is requesting premium class accommodations based on the 14-hour rule, they must justify how a rest stop will either prevent them from fulfilling their mission or would interfere with mission critical business at their ODS.

b) Agency Mission. The “agency mission” exception generally involves circumstances where employees have unanticipated responsibilities or significant workload issues which make functioning after travel difficult without an upgrade. The Department anticipates that it would be highly unusual and there would be very few instances where “agency mission” would justify premium class travel accommodations. Examples of where it might be appropriate would be circumstances in which matters are highly sensitive and time critical.

The following situations generally do not fall within the “agency mission” exception:

- Delivery of a speech;
- Participation in training or a conference;
- Routine Departmental business during regular work hours; or
- Attendance at luncheons.

Use of the “agency mission” exception requires a full written justification that describes:

- The exceptional nature of the mission requirements; and
- Why alternatives which would allow the use of coach class travel accommodations are not sufficient.

c) Medical. See NOAA Travel Regulations, Chapter 301-10 for information on premium class travel accommodations based on a medical disability:
<http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/~finance/documents/TR.301-10.doc>.

In no case may a request be based upon an employee’s grade or position. A request for premium class travel will not be approved when an employee chooses, for personal or other non-official reasons, an alternative schedule or indirect route which gives rise to the need for upgraded travel accommodations to allow enhanced rest or working conditions. Employees who upgrade to premium class using personal funds or frequent flyer points do not require NOAA approval.

For more information on premium class travel, please visit NOAA’s ‘Premium Class Travel’ site <http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/~finance/Premium%20Travel.html>, as well as Department of Commerce (DOC’s) Bulletin regarding premium class travel: http://www.osec.doc.gov/oas/Documents/OCS/Travel%20Bulletins/4_12.pdf.

Please direct any questions regarding this advisory to Rachael.S.Wivell@noaa.gov/(301) 444-2136 or Chasity.N.Donaldson@noaa.gov/(301) 444-2129.