

PREMIUM CLASS AIR TRAVEL APPROVAL

1. PURPOSE

This Notice informs Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) employees of the policy for requesting and approving premium class air travel.

2. POLICY

It is MRP policy that official air travel be conducted in the most prudent manner, while also being conducive to the employee's ability to effectively accomplish the program's mission. There are two types of premium class air travel: business class and first class. The independent airlines determine whether a class of service they offer is considered as business class or first class.

a. Business Class Travel

- (1) The Federal Travel Regulations (FTR) permit employees to fly business class when:
 - (a) The origin or destination is outside the continental United States; and
 - (b) The scheduled direct flight time exceeds 14 hours.
- (2) Although the regulations permit the approval of business class air travel in these instances, as prudent travelers, agencies and employees must consider the difference in cost between a contract city pair or coach fare and a business class fare. Agencies, generally, should not approve business class fares when the cost difference is extreme unless unusual circumstances exist. No approval is required when an employee uses frequent flyer benefits to upgrade to premium class accommodations and no cost to the Government results from the upgrade.

- (3) Prior to requesting a business class fare, MRP employees must take the following lower cost alternatives into consideration:
 - (a) Arriving at the destination a day early to rejuvenate from any physical discomfort following a long flight;
 - (b) Arranging an itinerary that uses layovers and connecting flights to prevent physical discomfort; and
 - (c) Using frequent flyer benefits earned through official travel to upgrade to business class accommodations.

- (4) After consideration of the above-mentioned alternatives has been made and it is determined that none of the alternatives is practical for the proposed trip, adhere to the following procedures to officially request the approval of business class travel:
 - (a) Prepare a written request to the Program's Deputy Administrator, Associate Administrator, or Administrator which demonstrates that lower cost alternatives were considered and explains why they are not practicable;
 - (b) Include the cost of the contract city pair fare and the cost of the business class fare;
 - (c) Obtain certification of the request by the above mentioned program official; and
 - (d) Route the request to the Under Secretary, MRP, through the Program Deputy Administrator.

NOTE: Rest stops are not authorized en route or upon arrival at destination when business class accommodations are approved.

b. First Class Travel

MRP policy for the approval of first class travel remains the same, with exception to Chapter 301-10.123 of the FTR which permits employees to upgrade to first-class accommodations at their personal expense, including the use of frequent flyer benefits. The MRP policy is stated in Chapter 301 3-1 of the MRP Supplements to the Agriculture Travel Regulations. First class travel must be approved by the MRP Under Secretary in advance and approval will be considered for the following circumstances:

- (1) Physical security of the passenger;
- (2) Medical reasons;
- (3) Sanitation or health deficiencies on a foreign air carrier; or
- (4) No other accommodations are available within 24 hours of the mission-required departure or arrival time.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

Supervisors/approving officials will ensure that requests submitted by employees for the use of premium class meet one of the above instances. If not, approval will be denied.

4. INQUIRIES

- a. AMS - questions may be directed to your travel coordinator on 202-690-3733.
- b. APHIS – questions may be directed to your regional office or the headquarters Travel Services Center on 301-734-5901.
- c. GIPSA – questions may be directed to your travel coordinator on 202-720-7045.
- d. This Notice can be accessed on the Internet at www.aphis.usda.gov/library, and the AMS Administrative Issuances home page at www.ams.usda.gov/issuances.

/s/

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