

# Wildlife Services Directive

4.190  
July 02, 2013

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## REIMBURSEMENT FOR USE OF PRIVATE WIRELESS AND INTERNET CONNECTIVITY

### 1. PURPOSE

To provide guidelines for Wildlife Services (WS) reimbursement for employees' use of personally-owned wireless telephones or internet connectivity to conduct official U.S. Government business.

### 2. REPLACEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

This directive revises WS Directive 4.190.1 dated February 14, 2013.

### 3. AUTHORITY

Authority to promulgate a policy addressing reimbursement for personally-owned wireless and internet connectivity is pursuant to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Departmental Manual 3300-005, dated November 10, 2010.

### 4. POLICY

a. It is WS policy that employees may be reimbursed for costs associated with using personally-owned wireless telephones (cell phones) and for internet service at employees' homes where the employee's home is the official duty station.

b. While it is WS policy that employees should not use personal wireless communications devices to conduct official Government business, management recognizes that such activity may occur on an occasional basis, and the intent is to provide reimbursement for costs incurred due to the infrequent, occasional use of such devices. Where required, costs related to usage taxes may be apportioned for reimbursement purposes, and shall in all cases be substantiated by an itemized call detail list or itemized invoice.

## 5. BACKGROUND

a. WS is a Federal agency within the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) of the USDA. The agency employs over 1,900 biologists, scientists, technicians, information technology professionals, and administrative personnel. Many employees work in field programs that are directed from the Eastern Regional and Western Regional offices, located in Raleigh, North Carolina, and Fort Collins, Colorado, respectively. Additionally, the National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC), as the research arm of Wildlife Services, provides scientific information regarding conflicts between humans and wildlife; NWRC scientists also develop methods to mitigate or prevent damage caused by wildlife.

b. To effectively implement WS programs, some employees spend the majority of their workday in the field – away from their workspaces that house landlines or hard-wired internet connectivity – and require access to wireless communication devices (i.e., cell phones). It is advantageous to the Government to allow employees so situated to use their personal wireless devices for official-business purposes in order to minimize the amount of equipment that must be carried by employees who work in the field. To ensure employees do not incur extra costs for Government-related, occasional use of their personally-owned wireless device, supervisors may approve reimbursement of such occasional use, subject to limitations contained herein.

## 6. DEFINITIONS

a. Basic Service Costs: The average monthly invoice amount for the preceding three (3) months. The average cost is calculated by adding the monthly costs for the preceding three months and dividing that sum by three.

b. Frequent Basis: Reimbursement request or personal use that occurs more than once in a three-month period.

c. Infrequent Basis: A reimbursement request or personal use that occurs no more than once in a three-month period.

d. Official Duty: Those activities performed by an employee as part of, or an extension of, regular official responsibilities.

e. Wireless Communication: Transmission of voice or data that occurs without wires.

f. Wireless Communication Device: Equipment (i.e., cell phone, laptop computer, personal digital assistant) with wireless capability.

g. Wireless Tool: Wireless hardware (i.e., cell phone, laptop computer, personal digital assistant) and associated software and services capable of transmitting, receiving, processing or storing information across a wireless medium.

7. IMPLEMENTATION

a. **Reimbursement for Internet Access in Employees' Homes**

(1) Supervisors shall reimburse employees for costs associated with internet access for employees whose official duty station is their home or for employees who participate in the telework program.

(2) Supervisors may, at their discretion, reimburse employees for costs associated with internet access for employees who are permitted to telework on a situational basis (i.e., telework for the employee's benefit).

(3) Reimbursement shall only be provided for the basic rate for internet service provider (ISP) connection services per billing period. Reimbursement shall not be provided for internet service initiation, activation, installation, or deactivation; taxes; equipment rental fees; or any other miscellaneous charges or fees pertaining to internet access.

(4) Employees requesting reimbursement must submit copies of invoices from their ISP and disclose whether the ISP provides "bundled" services; for example, cable television and/or telephone service are provided along with the internet connection. Where services are bundled, only the *pro rata* share of ISP costs is reimbursable. No additional apportionment for the purpose of reimbursement is required (i.e., there is no requirement to determine the percentage of time internet service was available versus the percentage of time the employee used the internet service).

(5) Where bundled services do not provide pricing information sufficient to determine the *pro rata* costs of the ISP component, no ISP costs are reimbursable.

(6) **Reimbursement**: A Standard Form (SF) 1164, Claim for Reimbursement for Expenditures on Official Business, must be submitted within ten (10) days of receiving the monthly bill or invoice. Additionally, a copy of the invoice or bill must accompany the SF-1164, regardless of the amount claimed for reimbursement.

A. In addition to submitting the SF-1164 and copy of invoice or bill, employees requesting reimbursement must also attest to the appropriate percentage of ISP services used for work-related purposes. Employees must attach a signed and dated declaration to the SF-1164 that contains the following language: **"I hereby certify that my internet service connection for which I am requesting reimbursement has been used in part for official Wildlife Services purposes. Official use was [X]% of the total usage."**

B. The SF-1164, along with the signed declaration, shall be completed and submitted in accordance with instructions contained in enclosure (1).

C. Reimbursement shall not be made on a flat fee basis or where the employee does not attest to the percentage of official use.

(7) Monthly Reimbursements Are Permitted: WS recognizes that internet service is an essential tool and is necessary for employees to telecommute without diminished productivity. Therefore, employees may request reimbursement for internet service on a monthly basis.

**b. Reimbursement for Official Use of Personal Cell Phones**

(1) Employees requesting reimbursement must submit copies of invoices from their wireless service provider and attest to the appropriate percentage of wireless calls used for work-related purposes. Supervisors must ensure that reimbursement requests for personally-owned wireless service do not exceed 20% of the basic service costs. Supervisors are also responsible for ensuring adequate safeguards exist to ensure the Government reimburses employees only for government- and official-duty-related calls.

(2) Employees requesting reimbursement must be prepared to submit copies of invoices for the preceding three-month period in order for the supervisor to establish the “basic service cost” associated with the wireless service. Additionally, Supervisors shall ensure that employees’ use of personally-owned cell phones to conduct official Government business is limited, and permitted only on an **exception basis**.

(3) Supervisors shall ensure that copies of all bills submitted for reimbursement are maintained for at least five (5) years after reimbursement has been made.

(4) Reimbursement: Reimbursement is limited to the **actual** costs incurred while conducting official duties, but limited to no more than 20% of the basic service costs, as determined by the employee’s supervisor.

A. A Standard Form (SF) 1164, Claim for Reimbursement for Expenditures on Official Business, must be submitted within ten (10) days of receiving the monthly bill or invoice. Additionally, a copy of the invoice or bill must accompany the SF-1164, regardless of the amount claimed for reimbursement.

B. Costs incurred due to official duties must be clearly delineated or marked on the bill or invoice. In addition, where costs such as taxes are apportioned, such apportionments must represent the same percentage as the Government-related costs to the entire bill. For example, if the employee incurs costs for 100 minutes of wireless service, but 15 of those minutes related to official duties, then only 15% of the taxes shall be claimed for reimbursement.

C. Employees must attach a signed and dated declaration to the SF-1164 that contains the following language: **“I understand and acknowledge that any costs claimed for reimbursement are subject to preservation requirements for records that are subject to**

**legal discovery. I further acknowledge that I may be obligated to provide copies of all bills and invoices submitted for reimbursement upon my agency's request."**

D. The SF-1164, along with the signed declaration, shall be completed and submitted in accordance with instructions contained in enclosure (1).

(5) Month-to-Month Reimbursements Are Generally Prohibited: In keeping with Departmental guidance, only **infrequent reimbursements for occasional charges** associated with the Government-business use of personally owned cell phones are permitted. Consequently, monthly or month-to-month reimbursements are not permitted.

c. **Limitations**: The following limitations apply and supersede any other provision contained herein:

(1) Reimbursement shall not be made for any official-duty-related use of wireless or internet services that cannot satisfy the preservation requirements for records that are subject to legal discovery.

(2) Reimbursement shall not be made for costs incurred due to activities that are illegal according to any local, State or Federal law, including activities that constitute copyright or trademark infringement.

(3) Reimbursement shall not be made for costs incurred due to activities that are inappropriate or offensive to fellow employees or the public. Such activities include, but are not limited to: speech or material that ridicules others on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, national origin, disability or age.

(4) Reimbursement shall not be made for costs incurred for posting agency information to external newsgroups, bulletin boards or other public forums without express, prior written approval.

## 8. APPLICABILITY AND SCOPE

This Directive applies to all WS personnel and all wireless tools used for Government business that transmit, receive, process or store voice and data, including videos and photographs.

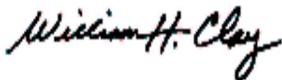
## 9. REFERENCES

- a. *Matter of Reimbursing Employees' Government Use of Private Cellular Phones at a Flat Rate*, B-287524 (Comp. Gen. Oct. 22, 2001).
- b. *Matter of Nuclear Regulatory Commission: Reimbursing Employees for Official Usage of Personal Cell Phones*, B-291076 (Comp. Gen. Mar. 6, 2003).

- c. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Departmental Manual 3300-005, Policies for Planning and Managing Wireless Technologies in USDA (Nov. 10, 2010).

10. ENCLOSURES

Enclosure (1): Standard Form 1164

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William H. Clay". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Deputy Administrator