

DECISION

u-95305
THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL
OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20548
50584

FILE: B-181431

DATE: February 27, 1975

MATTER OF: Proposed amendment to 2 Joint Travel Regulations
para. C2050-3

DIGEST: Proposed amendment to 2 JTR para. C2050-3 eliminating requirement of written orders for sea trial trips would not be proper since FTR para. 1-1.4 (May 1973) requires that written orders should be issued prior to incurring expenses, unless prior issuance is impractical or the travel is of a limited nature in the vicinity of the employees' station, financial controls would not be sufficient, and notice to the employees would not be made of their entitlement. However, issuance of general written travel order and multiple payment procedure would be proper.

By letter dated May 29, 1974, the Acting Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, on behalf of the Department of Defense Per Diem, Travel and Transportation Allowance Committee, requested our opinion on a proposed amendment to 2 Joint Travel Regulations para. C2050-3 which would eliminate the necessity of travel orders for civilian employees participating in sea trial trips when the only per diem involved is that payable while the employees are aboard the Government ship.

Prior to change 98, September 28, 1973, 2 JTR para. C8050-6 provided that civilian employees assigned to ships on trial trips for testing purposes were considered to be in a standby status and not eligible for per diem. The cited change deleted this provision and the aforementioned employees now are eligible for per diem. A large number of Navy employees participate in sea trial trips. The current procedure is to issue individual travel orders and process individual per diem claims although many employees participate in the same sea trial trips, between the same points, and with identical chargeable accounting data. The Acting Assistant Secretary advises us that:

"To eliminate the tremendous volume of paperwork currently required because of travel on sea trials, the Department of the Navy has recommended that JTR, para. C2050-3 be amended to include a provision that travel orders are not necessary for civilian employees participating in sea trial trips when the only per diem involved is the per diem payable while the employees are aboard the Government ship. They have also recommended inclusion of the following provisions:

Certification

" When orders are not issued, the certification of the commanding officer, or his designee, will constitute valid approval of per diem and transportation claim when ordered to perform sea trial trips. The certification of the commanding officer, or his designee, will be affixed on the reverse of DD Form 1351-2 as follows:

'I certify that the permanent duty station of the claimant was as stated during the period covered by this claim, that the temporary duty for which per diem is claimed was in performance of duty aboard the _____ during sea trial trips, and that the duty at the points stated in the schedule for the period claimed was directed. The account and schedule have been examined and certified correct.'

Multiple Payment Procedure

" When a number of employees participate in sea trial trips at the same time, between the same points, and the same accounting data are chargeable, it is not necessary that claims be submitted on individual DD Form 1351-2. A single DD Form 1351-2 will be used as a claim or claim voucher form to cover the entire group, and the notation, 'See Attached,' will be entered in the appropriate blocks for the claimant's name and his certifying officer. The claim will be supported by a Multiple Travel Payment List (DD Form 1351-6)."

Federal Travel Regulations (FPMR 101-7) para. 1-1.4 (May 1973), provides as follows:

"1-1.4. Authority for travel. Except as otherwise provided by law, all travel shall be either authorized or approved by the head of the agency or by an official to whom such authority has been delegated. Ordinarily, an authorization shall be issued prior to the incurrence of the expenses. The authorization shall be as specific as possible in the circumstances as to the travel to be performed."

The above provision and its preceding regulation in the Standardized Travel Regulations have been construed by this Office as requiring a written authorization or approval, although the words themselves are not clear on the matter. This construction is supported by FTR para. 1-11.3b (May 1973) which states that the travel voucher must be supported by a copy of the authorization. Therefore, except when prior issuance is impracticable, or when the travel is of such a limited nature that it is unnecessary, written authorization should be issued prior to incurrence of travel expenses. The travel in question is routine in the sense that it is of a repetitive nature and the per diem is limited to small entitlement. However, written travel order procedures assist in fund control and meeting requirements of recording obligations at the time they are incurred, as required by 2 General Accounting Office Policy and Procedure Manual 10.3 (August 1, 1972) and 7 GAO 17.1 (October 1, 1967). Moreover, they also serve to provide a notice and record of the employee's instructions and entitlements.

Under the proposed amendment the requirement for written travel orders under FTR para. 1-1.4 would not be met. Moreover the purposes for which written orders are prepared--fund control and definite notice of entitlement to the employees involved--would not be met. Therefore, the proposed amendment to 2 JTR C2050-3 in its present form would not be proper. However, we do not believe that individual written travel orders are necessary. Rather, it would suffice to issue a general written travel order authorizing per diem during a sea trial trip and setting out the dates of the duty, the rate of per diem, and accounting data, together with a list of employees assigned to such trip. A copy of such general travel order should be given to each employee. Regarding payment, it appears that the "Multiple Payment Procedure" would be proper.

Accordingly, we would have no objection to amending the regulations to provide for general written travel orders and multiple payment procedures for sea trial trips.

R.F. KELLER

~~Deputy~~ Comptroller General
of the United States