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**DECISION**



**THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL  
OF THE UNITED STATES  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20548**

**FILE:** R-202778

**DATE:** June 28, 1982

**MATTER OF:** Marshal R. Wilke - Actual subsistence expenses - Laundry expenses

**DIGEST:** Employee was authorized actual subsistence expenses for temporary duty assignment in Atlanta, Georgia, and New York City, from July 26, 1980, through August 14, 1980. Employee claims laundry and dry cleaning expenses of \$8.23 and \$48.22 for the two localities respectively. Employees are required by Federal Travel Regulations paragraph 1-1.3a to act prudently in incurring expenses while traveling on official business. Employee is entitled to only reasonable amounts for laundry expenses. Agency must make initial determination as to what is a reasonable amount. This Office will not disturb agency determination unless clearly erroneous or arbitrary or capricious.

This decision is in response to a request of Marie A. Bell, an authorized certifying officer of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF), Department of the Treasury, Washington, D. C. Ms. Bell's inquiry relates to an expense voucher submitted by Mr. Marshal R. Wilke, an employee of the BATF, which requests reimbursement of subsistence expenses incurred by Mr. Wilke while he was on temporary duty in Atlanta and New York. Specifically, the request raises the question as to what constitutes a reasonable amount that an employee may be reimbursed for laundry and dry cleaning expenses under the actual subsistence expense method.

Mr. Wilke began his temporary duty assignment on July 26, 1980, in Atlanta, Georgia, and traveled to New York City on August 3, 1980, to continue his assignment until completion on August 14, 1980. Mr. Wilke was authorized actual subsistence expenses, not to exceed \$50 per day. In support of his claim for actual subsistence expenses, Mr. Wilke submitted an itemization for each day's claimed expenses. The only item questioned by the agency is Mr. Wilke's claim for laundry expenses, which ranged from \$5.49 to \$12.58 for various days of the assignment. The amount claimed for laundry

and dry cleaning is \$8.23 in Atlanta and \$48.22 in New York, with the total for the 19 days being \$56.45. The agency found the total amount to be unreasonable, but did not specify what reasonable charges would be.

An employee is entitled to reimbursement for only reasonable expenses incurred incident to a temporary duty assignment since travelers are required by paragraph 1-1.3a of the Federal Travel Regulations, FPMR 101-7 (May 1973), to act prudently in incurring expenses. That paragraph provides that:

"An employee traveling on official business is expected to exercise the same care in incurring expenses that a prudent person would exercise if traveling on personal business."

In applying this requirement to claims for reimbursement of various types of travel expenses, this Office has consistently held that it is the responsibility of the employing agency to make the initial determination as to the reasonableness of the claimed expenses. See, for example, Micheline Motter and Linn Huskey, B-197621, B-197622, February 26, 1981. Where the employing agency has made the initial determination of reasonableness, this Office will overturn the agency's determination only where our review of the evidence results in a finding that the agency's determination was clearly erroneous, or arbitrary or capricious. Robert A. Jacobsen, B-198775, April 16, 1981. The burden is on the employee to prove that the agency's determination is defective. See 4 C.F.R. § 31.7 (1981).

In cases where the agency has not made a determination concerning reasonableness, this Office normally returns the claim to the agency for it to make the initial determination. Jacobsen, supra, and Ricky E. Virgne, B-203857, December 15, 1981.

In this case, while the agency has determined that the claimed amounts are unreasonable, it has not made any determination concerning what amount it considers reasonable. For this reason, we are returning the case to the agency for a determination as to what constitutes reasonable laundry and dry cleaning expenses. The determination should be made

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on the basis of the circumstances of Mr. Wilke's trip, with guidance from the experiences of other agency employees who performed temporary duty assignments in the Atlanta and New York areas during the same approximate time as Mr. Wilke. Of course, consideration should be given to any unusual circumstances which Mr. Wilke encountered.

Mr. Wilke's vouchers and supporting papers are returned for handling in accordance with the above.

for *Henry F. Allen*  
Comptroller General  
of the United States