



Highlights of [GAO-07-1268](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Previous GAO work on widespread improper premium class travel at the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Department of State (State) have led to concerns as to whether similar improper travel exists in the rest of the federal government. Consequently, GAO was asked to (1) determine the magnitude of premium class travel governmentwide and the extent such travel was improper, (2) identify internal control weaknesses that contributed to improper and abusive premium class travel, and (3) report on specific cases of improper and abusive premium class travel. GAO analyzed bank data and performed statistical sampling to quantify the extent premium class travel was improper. GAO also performed data mining, reviewed travel regulations, and interviewed agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

To improve management and oversight of premium class travel, GAO is making three recommendations to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and five recommendations to the General Services Administration (GSA). They include requiring agency reporting on premium class travel including business class, clarifying specific provisions of the Federal Travel Regulations (FTR), and creating an office for central oversight of agency travel policies to help ensure adherence to federal regulations. In written comments, OMB and GSA generally agreed with GAO's findings and recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-07-1268](#). For more information, contact Gregory Kutz at (202) 512-6722 or kutzg@gao.gov.

PREMIUM CLASS TRAVEL

Internal Control Weaknesses Governmentwide Led to Improper and Abusive Use of Premium Class Travel

What GAO Found

Breakdowns in internal controls and a weak control environment resulted in at least \$146 million in improper first and business class travel governmentwide. The federal government spent over \$230 million on about 53,000 premium class tickets from July 1, 2005, through June 30, 2006. Premium class tickets are costly—for example, a Department of Agriculture (USDA) executive flew business class from Washington, D.C., to Zurich, Switzerland, at a cost of \$7,500 compared to \$900 for a coach class ticket. Based on statistical sampling, GAO estimated that 67 percent of premium class travel was not properly authorized, justified, or both.

While business class travel accounted for 96 percent of all premium class travel, many agencies informed us that they did not track, and thus did not know the extent of, business class travel. OMB and GSA also did not require reporting of business class travel. GAO found large differences in premium class guidance governmentwide, with some agencies issuing less restrictive guidance that were tailored for executive travel. For example, the FTR allows premium class travel for flights over 14 hours if properly authorized. However, executives at the Foreign Agricultural Service frequently used “mission critical” to justify flights to Western Europe that typically lasted less than 10 hours. Other agencies, such as State and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), automatically approved premium class travel for all flights over 14 hours. GAO's analysis of flights involving destinations in the United States and Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Europe lasting 14 hours or more showed that 72 and 83 percent, respectively, of State's and MCC's flights involving these locations were in premium class. In contrast, 3 percent of all DOD's and the Department of Homeland Security's flights to the same locations were in premium class.

The examples below represent specific cases of improper and abusive use of premium class, including employees of entities not subject to the FTR that have issued policies that resulted in the purchase of costly premium class travel. For example, the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) allows all members of the board to fly first class whenever they are on business.

Examples of Improper, Abusive, and Wasteful Premium Class Travel

Agency	Cost of premium ticket(s)	Reason travel was improper or abusive
USDA	\$163,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive had subordinate authorize 25 premium class flights. Executive used “mission critical” to justify 10 of the 25 flights lasting less than 14 hours to Western Europe.
DOD	105,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive flew premium class 15 times claiming a medical condition. Medical condition was documentation with a note signed by a DOD employee, not a physician as required by DOD regulations.
State	46,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family of 8 flew premium class to relocate from Washington, D.C., to Eastern Europe. Coach tickets would have cost \$12,000.
USPS	2,200	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A member of the board flew first class round trip from Washington, D.C., to Los Angeles. Comparable coach price was \$400.

Source: GAO analysis of bank data and supporting documentation.