



**The Comptroller General
of the United States**

Washington, D.C. 20548

Decision

Matter of: Mark P. Dulin - Reimbursement for Household Goods
Moving Expenses - Auto Dolly

File: B-230726

Date: October 3, 1989

DIGEST

A transferred employee was authorized to move his household goods under a government bill of lading (GBL), and he chose to move himself. He is entitled to be reimbursed only for his actual expenses not to exceed what the government would have paid to move the goods by commercial carrier. The reimbursement, however, may not include the rental cost of an automobile trailer used to transport his car, since cars are not included in the definition of household goods which may be transported at government expense. The fact that the employee loaded the car with household goods is not a basis for payment, since the rental of the trailer was primarily to transport the car.

DECISION

We are asked whether a transferred employee who chose to move himself, after being authorized to move his household goods under a government bill of lading (GBL), may be reimbursed for costs associated with towing his automobile filled with household goods on a dolly behind the truck he rented to move his household goods.^{1/} As will be explained below, there is no basis upon which the employee can be reimbursed for the expense of the dolly used to tow an automobile.

BACKGROUND

Under a travel authorization issued on July 30, 1987, Mr. Mark P. Dulin, an employee of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, was authorized, among other things, to move his

^{1/} The case was submitted by Mr. W. D. Moorman, an authorized official of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Finance center, New Orleans, Louisiana.

046665/139689

household goods under the GBL method (also known as the actual expense method) in connection with his impending transfer from Hyattsville, Maryland, to Olympia, Washington. Rather than have his goods moved by a commercial household goods carrier under a GBL, Mr. Dulin chose to move himself. For this purpose he rented a truck and a specially built trailer called an auto dolly on which to tow his automobile behind the truck. Mr. Dulin states that by not driving the car, he was able to fill it with household goods that would not fit on the truck.

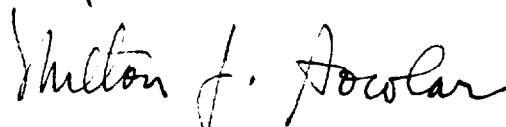
When Mr. Dulin submitted his voucher following his relocation to Olympia, Washington, there arose a question as to whether he was entitled to receive any reimbursement for rental of the dolly predicated on his having packed some of his household goods in his automobile and on the dolly. Mr. Dulin states that had he not packed household goods in his automobile, it would have been necessary for him to rent a trailer of approximately 143 cubic feet capacity that would have cost the government \$354.50. Therefore, he claims \$354.50, although the rental of the auto dolly cost him \$434.10. The agency submission asks whether Mr. Dulin can be reimbursed the \$434.10 or, if not, then some amount based on the auto dolly being used to transport household goods.

OPINION

When authorizing an employee to move at government expense, an agency is required to determine which of two systems, the commuted rate or GBL, will result in less cost to the government. See 41 C.F.R. § 101-40.203-4, and Fuller C. Jones, Jr., B-224660, Mar. 14, 1988. In Mr. Dulin's case apparently the GBL or actual expense method was determined to be less than the commuted rate. Once the GBL method is authorized, if the employee chooses to move his household goods by some other means, the government's financial responsibility toward the employee for shipping costs is limited to the employee's actual cost not to exceed the cost which the government would have incurred had the household goods been moved under a GBL by the lowest cost carrier providing the level of service required by the agency at the time the GBL method was authorized. See 41 C.F.R. § 101-40.203-2(b) (1987). Thus, where an employee, such as Mr. Dulin, chooses to move the goods himself, his reimbursement is limited to his actual expenses, such as vehicle rental fees, fuel, tolls, etc., not to exceed what it would have cost the government to move the goods by commercial carrier. See 41 C.F.R. § 101-40.203-2(d); Timothy Shaffer, B-223607, Dec. 24, 1986.

Under the Federal Travel Regulations (FTR), an automobile is expressly excluded from the definition of household goods that may be transported at government expense. See FTR, para. 2-1.4h (Supp. 4, August 23, 1982), incorp. by refer. 41 C.F.R. § 101-7.003 (1987), implementing 5 U.S.C. § 5727(a). In view of this exclusion, we denied an employee's claim for the cost of renting an auto dolly to transport his automobile behind a rented truck in the same manner as did Mr. Dulin. See Mark A. Smith, B-228813, Sept. 14, 1988. While in the Smith case the claim was not based on the employee having also transported some household goods in his automobile or on the trailer, we do not consider that a basis to distinguish that case from Mr. Dulin's case. It is clear that Mr. Dulin's purpose in renting the auto dolly was to transport his automobile. While had Mr. Dulin not placed some goods on the dolly or in the automobile he may have had to rent a larger truck or make other arrangements, that does not change the fact that the primary purpose of the dolly was to transport the automobile, and transporting some goods in the automobile or on the trailer was merely ancillary to that purpose. Thus, the cost of renting the dolly was incurred to transport the automobile and that cost is not reimbursable.

Accordingly, Mr. Dulin's claim is denied.

for 
Comptroller General
of the United States