

ETHICS ADVISORY 99-02 - SECARMY's New Travel Policy

The Secretary of the Army has issued a new travel policy memorandum, as prepared by his Administrative Assistant. The Honorable Louis Caldera signed the memorandum on 8 April 1999, superseding the policy issued on 8 December 1995. Although the Secretary's new policy is probably still being distributed through channels, I have obtained a copy of it. In my review of the policy, I note that there is a **significant change** concerning the use of frequent flyer mileage and related promotional mileage credits (FFMs) that I should bring to your attention.

The 1995 SECARMY policy stated that first consideration should be given to redeeming FFMs earned during official travel to defray official travel costs; and that FFMs may also be used for accommodation upgrades to premium-class (less than first-class) while on official travel.

The new 1999 SECARMY policy permits the use of FFMs earned from official travel to be redeemed for premium-class (less than first-class) travel upgrades in **only** the two following situations:

1. When the JTR or JFTR authorizes such premium-class (less than first-class) travel in the first place (see below for when a TDY traveler may travel in premium-class (less than first-class)).

2. When the FFMs may only be redeemed for upgrades. There are three examples:

- a. The airline does not permit the use of the FFMs for anything other than an upgrade.

- b. If the traveler has enough FFMs for an upgrade, but not enough for a ticket or other reduction in travel costs, the traveler is expected to let the FFMs accrue until there are enough FFMs to apply to future travel requirements.

- c. If the traveler has enough FFMs for an upgrade, but not enough for a ticket, but absent a redemption for an upgrade, the FFMs will expire and go unused, the traveler may redeem the FFM for an upgrade.

Other important guidance:

1. FFMs earned while in official travel belong to the Government and may not be used in any manner for personal travel or personal purposes (e.g., donating to a charity).

2. Official FFM accounts should be maintained separate from personal FFM accounts. Where government-earned FFMs and personal FFMs have been commingled into a

single FFM account, all FFMs within the account will be considered to be property of the US Government absent a clear accounting of FFM to the contrary.

3. When an airline flight only has two classes of accommodations, the higher class, regardless of the term used for that class, is considered to be first-class -- which means premium-class (other than first-class) TDY travel, whether authorized by the JTR or JFTR or by use of FFMs, is not permitted on that flight.

4. All first-class travel must meet the stringent criteria of the JTR or JFTR and requires SECARMY approval, except that:

(a) Employees may upgrade to a premium-class using personal FFMs or other personal resources.

(b) Employees may accept "on the spot" type upgrades that are *not* offered because of their official position (for example, an employee arrives at the check-in, and learns that the aircraft is overbooked and full except for a first-class seat; if offered, the employee may accept that seat).

(c) Employees may use a coupon received because of their membership in an airline "club" by virtue of the number of miles that they have flown with the airline, even if some or all were flown on TDY. However, this must be a "no cost" upgrade, meaning that the employee does not cash in official mileage point to gain membership in the club, or exchange official points for the coupon.

(d) Military members flying first-class in accordance with the above, must not travel in uniform.

Requirement for premium-class (less than first-class) air travel:

The traveler, regardless of rank or grade, must provide a written justification for each instance of such travel to the travel orders approving authority, who may authorize premium-class (less than first-class) when:

(a) Regularly scheduled flights provide only premium-class seats;

(b) No space is available in coach, and travel is so urgent it cannot be postponed;

(c) Necessary to accommodate a traveler's disability or other physical impairment substantiated in writing by a competent medical authority;

(d) Travel on a foreign flag carrier has been approved and the sanitation or health standards in coach are inadequate;

(e) Overall savings to the Government result by avoiding additional subsistence costs, overtime, or lost productive time that would be incurred while waiting for available coach seats;

(f) Travel costs are paid by a non-federal source (but special conditions, approvals and reports are required before such costs can be accepted);

(g) Obtained through the redemption of FFMs (but, very limited -- see above); or

(h) Travel involves an OCONUS destination or departure point, crossing several time zones, and the scheduled flight time exceeds 14 hours (including stopovers (as opposed to layovers) between flights), gate to gate. If this authority is used, the traveler is not authorized a rest period upon arrival, although he or she is permitted a short, reasonable time to check into a hotel and freshen up if necessary. However, this exception is not to be used in lieu of scheduling coach-class accommodations that allow for authorized rest stops. On the return flight, premium-class (less than first-class) travel will not be authorized simply because the total flight time (including stopover) exceeds 14 hours.

(i) Security concerns or exceptional circumstances make such travel essential to the successful performance of the mission.

If you have any questions, please contact one of the HQ AMC Ethics Team:

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