



## AMC DCSPER News Item



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### **Ethics Regulations and Official Travel**

Members of the Armed Forces and Federal civilian employees must be aware of the ethics rules that apply when they use commercial transportation for official travel. This article summarizes the most significant rules:

All frequent flyer miles earned through TDY or other duty travel are the property of the Federal Government. You may only use these "official" frequent flyer miles for other official travel and you may never use any of these miles for personal travel.

Government travelers should first consider using "official" frequent flyer miles to obtain free TDY or duty travel, resulting in a cost savings to the Government. The travel offices at some commands and installations have programs in place to help you coordinate using "official" frequent flyer miles to obtain free TDY or duty travel. Check with your travel approving authority for information on these programs at your command.

Government travelers have the discretion to exchange "official" frequent flyer miles to upgrade their seating from coach class to business class during TDY or other duty travel (see the definition of business class, below).

You should avoid commingling frequent flyer miles earned through personal travel in the same account as "official" frequent flyer miles. If personal and "official" miles are commingled, you may not use any of the frequent flyers miles in the commingled account for personal travel unless you have documentation or other proof that the miles you use were obtained only through personal travel.

Finally, if you use a personal credit card to pay for your official travel, and you earn frequent flyer miles from the credit card company, you may keep these miles for personal use. The frequent flyer miles in this case are not the direct result of official travel, but are derived from the form of payment, which you have selected. Note, however, that some commands and installations strongly encourage their personnel to use the Government issued American Express

(AMEX) Card to pay for official travel. If you use the AMEX Card to pay for official travel, any benefits from AMEX belong to the Federal Government.

Generally, any gift you receive during your official travel that is worth more than \$20.00, or that is given to you because of your official title or position, is the property of the federal government.

If, during official travel, you are involuntarily "bumped" from your seat, and you receive a free or discounted ticket as compensation, the free or discounted ticket is the property of the Federal Government, and you may only use it for other official travel. On the other hand, if you voluntarily surrender your seat during official travel, and you receive a free or discounted ticket as compensation, you may keep it and use the benefit for your personal travel.

You may not voluntarily surrender your seat if this action would impair your official duties. In addition, if you voluntarily surrender your seat, and the travel delay would cause you to incur additional per diem costs, you must account for the period of delay on your leave form as annual leave.

Some carriers offer travel incentive programs in which travelers become eligible for seating upgrades or special waiting areas if they accumulate a large number of miles on that carrier. You may accept membership and take advantage of the benefits during official or personal travel, even if your membership is based on your official travel, so long as your membership is not offered to you because of your official title, grade, or position.

Generally all official travel must be in coach class. You may purchase first class tickets for official travel only IF:

- \* there are no other reasonably available accommodations;
- \* you are disabled and your condition necessitates first class travel
- \* there are exceptional security concerns

These same three allowances also apply to travel in business class. You may also purchase business class tickets IF:

- \* your travel is approved on a foreign flag carrier and the sanitation or health standards in coach are inadequate
- \* an overall savings to the Government will result (such as avoidance of additional subsistence costs, overtime, or lost productive time incurred while waiting for a coach class seat to become available)
- \* travel is in excess of 14 hours and you will not have adequate time to rest between your arrival and beginning your official duties (in this event, consult your travel approving authority or commander, from whom you must receive prior permission, and whose authority to permit this travel is limited by further restrictions)
- \* your travel costs are paid by a nonfederal source

You may not use payments from a nonfederal source to purchase first class tickets for official travel. Four Star and Three Star Generals are authorized to purchase business class tickets when traveling overseas on official TDY business.

When there are only two classes of seating, the higher class is always considered by the Government to be first class, regardless of the description given by the carrier. When there are three or more classes of seating, the intermediate class(es) are considered business class.

You may accept a free on the spot upgrade to a higher class of seating so long as the upgrade is generally available to the public, to all federal employees or all military personnel. You may not accept a free on the spot upgrade given to you because of your official title, grade or position.

Military personnel should avoid the appearance of impropriety by not upgrading to first class when traveling in uniform. Credits for seating upgrades you receive during official travel may not be used later for your personal travel, unless you received the credit by voluntarily surrendering your seat.

Ethics rules that apply to official travel are not always intuitively obvious. Consult your local travel approving authority and your ethics counselor if you become aware of a potential ethics issue in this area. Bon Voyage!

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