

S-260: Interagency Incident Business Management

UNIT 6 - TRAVEL

Individuals traveling to emergency incidents need to understand the mobilization process, who and what will be reimbursed, and at what rate. They need to know the different regulations involved with the different modes of transportation.

This unit is not only for travelers—anyone who aids in arranging or reimbursing travel will want to run down this information to get the most current and cost-effective travel processes and policies.

The Travel unit provides an overview of:

- The mobilization process
- Travel expense reimbursement
- Transportation
- Other travel considerations

An incident agency needs additional resources to fight a fire that has exceeded its capabilities. Travel is necessary, and personnel resources are motivated for mobilization.

The travel mobilization process for incident assignments for individual units includes:

- Mobilization responsibilities and communications
- Resource orders

Four areas are responsible for mobilization. Each one communicates with the other to make sure qualified and available resources (both people and equipment) arrive at the incident—and then return.

The mobilization process includes:

- Resource ordering and status system (ROSS)
- Local dispatch center
- Home unit
- Incident agency

ROSS is a national system linking qualified and available resources with agencies needing them, and vice versa. Personnel traveling to incidents from their own unit need to be:

- Qualified, according to their Red Card
- Available
- "Stated" in ROSS

For personnel to become stated, someone has to make them available. This is done by:

- You—by going into the ROSS system yourself
- A dispatch center
- A home unit supervisor

Since ROSS systems vary from entity to entity, personnel need to find out their local unit's ROSS procedures.

Once resources have been matched through ROSS to fill an incident order, the local dispatch center:

- Confirms the resource that is to fill the position
- Arranges for travel

Means of travel may include, but are not limited to:

- Buying a plane ticket
- Chartering aircraft
- Driving apparatus to an incident
- Hauling the apparatus on a low-boy, and personnel driving separately
- Driving an agency vehicle
- Driving a privately owned vehicle (POV)

The home unit generates the travel authorization, which—of course—varies from department to department.

Regular government employees and casuals are responsible for:

- Obtaining information regarding their home unit's travel policies, procedures, and requirements
- Following established incident agency procedures

The incident agency's responsibilities are threefold in terms of the mobilization process. First, it is responsible for submitting resource requests through ROSS for needed equipment or personnel resources.

Second, the incident agency is responsible for providing agency requirements and guidelines regarding meals, lodging, and transportation policies to incident support units, such as the:

- Buying team
- Expanded dispatch

Finally, the incident agency is also responsible for:

- Submitting demobilization information to the local dispatch center
- Working with the incident planning section to arrange return travel

Before resources can travel, the process of mobilization occurs in a cycle of communication among four processes.

Match each department with the MOST appropriate description.

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| • ROSS | Links resource orders with qualified and available resources |
| • Dispatch center | Arranges for travel |
| • Home unit | Generates the travel authorization |

- Incident agency Submits resource orders through ROSS and arranges for return travel

The resource order form is submitted through ROSS by the incident agency to request additional resources. You can obtain your resource order form from your home dispatch center. Personnel resources **MUST** take the resource order form with them to the incident.

DO NOT commence travel without the resource order in hand.

The incident agency can request various categories on the resource order form, including:

- Overhead (O)—a request for a single resource (a person)
- Crew (C)
- Equipment (E)
- Aircraft (A)
- Services/supplies (S)

The resource order form must contain the corresponding request code for whichever category is needed.

The resource order form can be broken into three main sections:

- Incident information, blocks 2–11
- Resource information, block 12
- Order relayed information, block 13

Incident Information

The incident information section contains:

- The requested resource code in the top left corner
- Incident information, such as date, time, name, and the incident or project number

Resource Information

The resource information section contains:

- Specific information such as kind code, and type for whichever resource is requested
- Date and time the incident would like the resource to arrive
- The names of personnel communicating from each dispatch center in the From and To areas

Order Relayed Information

The order relayed information section contains:

- Request number, date, and time
- Action(s) taken for the order

Identify THREE types of resources that can be ordered.

- Overhead
- Aircraft
- Equipment
- Physicians and nurses
- MP3 players

We covered the fundamentals of the initial mobilization process, in particular the four main mechanisms involved in acquiring resources and arranging travel.

We described the:

- Resource ordering and status system (ROSS)
- Local dispatch center
- Home unit
- Incident agency

The mobilization process is complete. The travelers obtained information regarding their home *unit's* travel policies, procedures, and requirements, and now they are in the air.

During the course of their trip, some out-of-pocket expenses have incurred, and they need to know how to be reimbursed.

This topic covers:

- Who and what is eligible for reimbursement
- Per diem
- Reimbursement process
- Foreign travel

You may be wondering who and what is eligible for travel expenditure reimbursement. The who is easy, and the what may vary.

Who is eligible?

- Federal government employees
- Casuals
- Contractors
- Cooperators

Federal Government Employees

All federal government employees in travel status are entitled to per diem for:

- Meals

- Lodging
- Incidental expenses

Casuals

Casuals in travel status are covered under federal travel regulations, including per diem rates. Meals and lodging are normally provided. However, if they are not, then keep those receipts for reimbursement at per diem rates.

Other authorized out-of-pocket expenses, such as rental cars, parking, taxi, and lodging while out on assignment and for training are reimbursed at per diem.

Contractors

Contractors cannot receive travel authorizations. However, federal agencies may reimburse contractors for travel costs as outlined in the contract. Meals and lodging may be provided on the incident, but expenses for them are not reimbursed.

Cooperators

Cooperators may receive travel reimbursement according to their home unit policies.

Per diem is the amount a traveler is allowed for lodging, and meals and incidental expenses (M&IE). The per diem rate is based on the location of lodging so that rates for a fire in Park County, Wyoming, are different from rates for Sheridan County, Wyoming. Reimbursement rates within the same county even vary for different times of the year.

Most fire locations have a base per diem rate for the continental United States (CONUS). Individuals will not be reimbursed for amounts exceeding the per diem allotment. Current per diem rates can be found at <http://www.gsa.gov>.

Review the following provisions:

- Travel
- Lodging
- Meals
- Incidental expenses
- Telephone calls

Per diem rates for first and last travel days are a bit less than a normal full day's reimbursement rate. On your departure and return days, the rate is based on three fourths of the M&IE rate, regardless of travel departure and return time.

There is no per diem allowance for travel of less than 12 total hours.

If the incident agency provides lodging—which could be simply tents and blankets under the

wide-open skies—then personnel are not entitled to reimbursement if they choose to stay in a hotel.

However, depending upon the location of the incident, hotel lodging may be authorized. If so, federal employees and casuals need a receipt to be reimbursed.

Meals are usually provided on an incident assignment. If they are, reimbursement may not be claimed if personnel choose to purchase a meal elsewhere.

The incident agency may provide meals through the use of designated restaurants under a procurement method, at no cost to the individual. Meal costs (excluding alcohol) plus gratuity should not exceed the allowed meal rate amount. If the meal does exceed the rate allowed, the individual is responsible for paying the balance.

When the incident agency does not provide meals, individuals should follow their home unit policy for the use of a government purchase card to purchase meals. Per diem rates are still relevant, and go ahead and save those receipts—just in case.

The incidental expense amount (usually \$5 per day) for regular federal employees and casuals provides for non-meal personal expenses such as newspapers and toiletries. Rates for cooperators may vary, and cooperators should ask their home unit.

If meals and lodging are provided by the incident agency, those related per diem rates will be subtracted from the M&IE allotment. Personnel will then be reimbursed only for incidental expenses.

Telephone calls may be authorized by agency regulations but are considered a privilege and not an entitlement. If there is a phone available, be courteous and keep calls short.

Telephones are not guaranteed. They are not much of an issue anymore because most personnel have private cell phones. If cell phones are used, home units may or may not reimburse for minutes.

When in doubt, keep receipts—in this case, monthly phone statements.
In order to be reimbursed, personnel need to submit:

- Travel vouchers
- Receipts

Generally, individuals will not be reimbursed unless receipts are provided to their home unit. This policy varies from agency to agency, so when in doubt, save receipts!

Personnel left Nevada for an incident in California. They purchased lunch while traveling, and dinner was provided at the incident base camp. Other out-of-pocket expenses were incurred as well.

The travelers want to know how much per diem they will be reimbursed. When they go to <http://www.gsa.gov> to check the current rates, they need to find the rate according to the location of

- lodging
- meals purchased
- the home unit
- CONUS rates

The M&IE per diem rate for an incident area is \$44 and a \$5 incidental allowance expense, but the incident agency has provided meals and lodging.

What per diem amount will the traveler be reimbursed?

- \$5
- Three fourths of the \$44, or \$33
- \$44
- No per diem money will be reimbursed

On occasion, travel might take you over the border into another country. If and when this happens, you'll need a:

- Valid passport
- VISA (if required)
- Immunization records
- Cash or traveler's checks

Some additional items you'll need to find out about are:

- Travel authorizations
- Government travel charge card
- Country-specific entrance laws
- Country-specific information
- Contact names and numbers
- Rental car and personal insurance

Travel Authorizations

Contact the agency travel coordinator to obtain information specific to foreign travel, including:

- Proper travel authorization
- Other required paperwork
- Foreign travel per diem rates
- Insurance information
- Other pertinent agency policies and guidelines

Government Travel Charge Card

Find out the exchange rates between the U.S. dollar and the currency of the country to which you are traveling.

You'll need to contact your unit's agency program coordinator prior to commencing travel to make sure monthly limits on the credit card are adequate.

Country-Specific Entrance Laws

Some countries have certain entrance laws and regulations pertaining to entering their country. For example, Canada considers certain violations as felonies (like driving under the influence) and may require an individual to pay a fine in order to enter.

If there are ever any **issues entering a country, notify the immediate supervisor and dispatch. You are responsible for any fines obtained; no reimbursement is authorized.**

Country-Specific Information

It's a good idea to familiarize yourself with the country's vegetation, insects, climate, and housing and diet. The requesting agency can provide this information, or dispatch can provide a name, telephone number, or Web site address.

Contact Names and Numbers

Make sure to update emergency telephone numbers and contacts with the immediate supervisor. Upon arrival, contact the home unit dispatch and immediate supervisor with the details of your location and contact information.

Rental Car and Personal Insurance

Individuals traveling outside the United States will be reimbursed for the cost of rental car insurance. Such insurance is necessary because of the rental and leasing agency requirements mandated by foreign statutes and because of legalities if an accident occurs.

In this case, keep your insurance payment documentation and receipts for reimbursement.

Personal traveler's insurance is not reimbursable.

In this topic, we covered:

- Who and what is eligible for reimbursement
- Per diem
- Reimbursement process

- Foreign travel

Some key points for federal government employees and casuals to remember include:

- You should always check <http://www.gsa.gov> for current per diem rates.
- Any amount spent over the per diem allowance is paid by the individual.
- If meals and lodging are provided, only incidental expenses will be reimbursed.
- First and last days of travel are covered at three fourths the per diem rate.
- Travel that totals less than 12 hours does not receive a per diem allowance.

In the Mobilization Process topic of this module, we describe how the dispatch center provides numerous methods for arranging travel. Specific regulations apply when the mode of transportation includes privately owned vehicles (POVs) or rental cars.

This topic covers regulations and restrictions when traveling by:

- POV
- Rental car

You are permitted to use your POV when it's financially advantageous to the government and when it has been authorized on the resource order form.

The traveler should record the total daily mileage and claim the applicable mileage rate on the travel voucher.

The traveler will be reimbursed ONLY for mileage, no matter what happens during the course of travel—meaning—you break it, you buy it.

Rental vehicle restrictions and regulations include:

- Authorization on a resource order
- Use for government purposes only
- Obtainment via a procurement official

When rentals are obtained through the procurement official, this benefits both the agency as well as the traveler because the:

- Vehicle becomes the responsibility of the incident agency
- Vehicle becomes transferable from one individual to another as a "pool" vehicle
- Traveler is absolved of the responsibility of filing a claim on his or her travel voucher

Additional insurance, if purchased, is not reimbursed by the government.

A rental vehicle is needed, as indicated on the resource order.

Which entity is encouraged to rent it?

- Procurement official from the incident agency
- The traveler
- The home unit

- Resource ordering and status system (ROSS)

Key points to remember for the POV include:

- It must be authorized on the resource order.
- Only mileage will be reimbursed.

Key points to remember for a rental car include:

- It must be authorized on the resource order.
- It should be obtained via a procurement official.
- Additional insurance, if purchased, will not be reimbursed.

During travel to incident assignments, unique circumstances sometimes arise. For example, what if the traveler needs to take a leave of absence? What happens if there are deviations from the scheduled travel route? Who pays for extra luggage on a commercial airplane flight? Established regulations govern such unusual instances.

This topic covers:

- Travel advances
- Leave while in travel status
- Travel deviations
- Commercial airline travel

Most federal agencies are unable to provide cash advances to emergency incident personnel. Regular government employees and *casuals* need to be prepared to meet their personal needs using:

- Personal credit cards or cash
- Government travel card

Personal Credit Cards or Cash

Personnel can use their own cash or credit cards to meet their spending needs while on travel status. Documentation is rule no. 1—so save receipts for possible reimbursement according to per diem allowances.

Government Travel Card

Federal government travel cards may be used for cash withdrawal from automated teller machines (ATMs) for personal travel-related expenses. You'll want to stay within your agency's limits or guidelines—this isn't an opportunity to go hog wild.

To take a leave of absence while in travel status, personnel need to obtain written approval from the home unit in advance.

When return travel plans change due to leave of absence, individuals need to inform the:

- Incident agency

- Dispatch center
- Home unit

If personnel are approved for leave, they:

- Do not qualify for reimbursement
- Are responsible for any differences in the cost to return home
- Do not receive money back if the return trip is less expensive than the original ticket

Travel should be limited to the most economical and efficiently traveled route.

Deviations from this route:

- Require prior written approval from the home unit
- Require approval from the incident agency
- Will be at the expense of the traveler

Dispatch offices provide transportation arrangements to the original departure point. Individuals are responsible for handling any changes to this route as well as paying for any differences in cost.

Deviation regulations differ for:

- Casuals
- Family emergencies

Deviation for Casuals

Casuals who deviate from the normal travel route home are considered "no longer available" and are not entitled to travel time home or to transportation provided by the government from the point where the travel deviation occurs.

Travel deviation must be documented and attached to the OF-288 for use by the payment unit. This documentation also becomes part of the incident record.

Family Emergencies

Individuals released from an incident due to family emergency may be provided transportation to destinations other than the original departure point if there is no additional cost to the government. If there is an additional cost, it is the responsibility of the individual.

When it comes to commercial airline travel, individuals need to be aware of:

- Standard gear policy
- Airport security
- Frequent flyer miles

Standard Gear Policy

Standard gear policy:

- Is described in detail in the National Mobilization Guide
- Related to commercial gear weights and charges appears on the GSA Web site
- Has a supplemental weight when travel is with an incident management team

Airport Security

Airport security has increased substantially, so:

- Be aware of gear contents (such as knives and fusees)
- Make sure your name listed in the resource ordering and status system (ROSS) matches your photo ID
- Plan for extra time to get through security

Frequent Flyer Miles

The National Defense Authorization Act of 2002 authorizes federal employees to retain promotional items earned while traveling for business, including frequent flyer miles. Personnel are traveling to an incident on a commercial airliner. They need to know the policies and weight restrictions for gear.

Identify TWO sources where this information can be found.

- National Mobilization Guide
- GSA Web site
- SIIBM Incident Response Pocket Guide (IRPG)
- National Interagency Travel Guide (NITG)

As we said, if there is a need to deviate from the usual route, get prior approval. If a leave of absence is requested, get prior approval. Check weights and gear policies before traveling, and be prepared for increased airport security.

This topic covered all of this and more, including:

- Travel advances
- Leave while in travel status
- Travel deviations
- Commercial airline travel