# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
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FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT MEMORANDUM 2016-010 (Vol. X.M)

To: Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs
Director, Bureau of Land Management
Director, Fish and Wildlife Service
Director, National Park Service
Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation
Director, U.S. Geological Survey
Bureau Chief Financial Officers

From: Jim Douglas
Director
Office of Wildland Fire

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Office of Financial Management

Subject: Casual Hire Travel Expense Reimbursement Waiver

**BACKGROUND**

The Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Fish and Wildlife Service are responsible for deploying firefighting resources to significant wildfire and all-hazard incidents that threaten damage to Federal property, have the potential to cause loss of life, serious injury, public health risk, or damage to natural or cultural resources unless brought under immediate control. In order to meet this mission requirement, these Department of the Interior (DOI) agencies must hire temporary employees, referred to as "casual employees or casual hires" (i.e., firefighters), for short periods of time to deploy to these wildfire and all-hazard incidents.

In many instances, the administrative cost of processing travel documents for casual employees exceeds the individual travel claim amount. In order to reduce the costs related to creating and processing these travel documents, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget issued a waiver allowing a subset of casual employees to claim travel expenses through payroll payments that are processed with the Optional Form (OF)-288, *Incident Timekeeping Report*.

## TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT PROCESS

Under the terms of the waiver, casual employees may claim the following travel expenses on the OF-288 form:

- Privately Owned Vehicle (POV) mileage;
- Incidental expenses; and
- Maximum of 15 meals per emergency incident.

If the casual employee incurs a travel expense other than those listed above, the claim for travel expenses must be filed in the DOI E-Gov Travel System (ETS). Travel to attend training or prescribed fire projects must also be claimed using the ETS. Under no circumstances will a casual hire be reimbursed under both the OF-288 form process and ETS for the same travel incident. No other DOI employee or invitational traveler is eligible to make claim for travel expenses by using the OF-288 form.

All temporary duty (TDY) travel for casual employees will be governed and processed in accordance with General Service Administration (GSA) Federal Travel Regulations and DOI TDY Travel Policy.

Non-compliance with these regulations may result in a bill for collection issued to the casual employee.

The Casual Payment Center (CPC) staff will work with each hiring location to ensure the casual employee's pay on the OF-288 is not delayed pending travel reimbursement. When a casual employee's travel includes expenses that cannot be claimed on the OF-288 form (e.g., lodging or other travel expenses), the claim must be made in the DOI ETS. The CPC will ensure that travel expenses are removed from the OF-288 and will process the casual employee's payroll only.

The DOI ETS must be used for the following travel expense claims:

- Lodging paid by casual employee;
- Rental vehicle leased by casual employee;
- All training and non-emergency related travel that can be planned and authorized in advance (e.g., prescribed fire projects and training);
- Other expenses not allowed for reimbursement via the OF-288 (e.g., baggage fees, laundry costs, cab fare, etc.); and
- Any expense not listed previously as an expense that is allowed for claim on an OF-288 form.

When a casual employee has travel expenses that require a claim be made in DOI ETS, a copy of the casual employee's OF-288, along with supporting documents and receipts, is required to be uploaded onto the ETS travel voucher for the period of travel. This documentation requirement will help control the risk of duplicate payment of travel expenses.

INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM - FINANCE
Each DOI casual employee will be given a copy of their OF-288 incident timesheet when they are released from the incident for which they were hired. Their hiring unit will determine travel reimbursement and, if appropriate, submit to the CPC for processing.

**DOI CASUAL PAYMENT CENTER**

The CPC staff will verify that qualifying travel claims submitted on OF-288 forms follow DOI and GSA guidelines. The CPC staff will validate, as accurate, the allowable per diem rate and mileage rate claim on each form and process the OF-288 for payment. Payments will be posted to the following pay codes:

- TRV - to budget object class 211E for per diem (incidental and meals); and
- CMN - budget object class 211P for POV mileage.

If there are questions regarding the travel reimbursement or if there are travel expenses that are not allowed for reimbursement through the OF-288 submission process, the CPC staff will contact the approving official (AO) at the hiring unit and delay processing the OF-288 until it has been corrected to remove any errors.

**DOI CASUAL EMPLOYEE TRAVEL PAYMENT MONITORING**

Monitoring plans will be implemented and performed at the hiring unit, CPC, Bureau and Department levels. The monitoring plan shall require the AO to identify which method of reimbursement is appropriate for casual employee travel expenses (through the ETS or OF-288). As part of the batch approval process, the AO will certify that the OF-288s are accurate, appropriate, and legal for payment.

Bureaus will ensure that casual employee travel claims submitted on the OF-288 form are valid and only represent allowed travel expenses. The Financial and Business Management System, CPC, and Federal Personnel Payroll System records should be used to facilitate this monitoring process.

If you have any questions regarding to this memorandum, please contact Robert Smith at (202) 208-6584 or via e-mail at Robert_Smith@ios.doi.gov.

cc: Bureau Finance Officers
Bureau Relocation Leads
Interior Fire Executives
Interior Fire Directors