



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Office of the Chief Financial Officer
Finance Office

October 4, 2011

MEMORANDUM FOR: Assistant Administrators
Line and Staff Office Directors

FROM: Jon P. Alexander 
Director, Finance Office/Comptroller

SUBJECT: Travel Record Retention Policy

Purpose.

The attached policy addresses travel record retention changes with the implementation of the Post As Approved project.

Effective Date. The provisions of this policy are effective October 24, 2011.

Background.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Finance Office, in conjunction with the Office of the Chief Administrative Office (OCAO), is implementing procedures for the retention of travel records as part of the Integrated Travel Manager (ITM) Post As Approved project. These procedures are only applicable to Temporary Duty (TDY) and local travel documents and do not pertain to Permanent Change of Station (PCS).

Effective October 31, 2011 Travel Vouchers will no longer require hard copy submission to your servicing Finance Branch. This change does not apply to Travel Vouchers selected for audit and Travel Vouchers belonging to Excepted Employees and Invitational Travelers. Travel Vouchers meeting one of the exceptions mentioned will continue to require hard copy submission to your servicing Finance Branch for payment.

Policy.

All ORIGINAL travel documents will be retained by the Line/Staff Offices. This also includes NOAA Corps travelers. It is recommended the Traveler, Voucher Preparer, and Approving Official retains a complete travel package for all electronically routed documents. A complete travel package is defined as an approved Travel Voucher, all associated receipts and any other necessary documents to support the claim. Each of these individuals will serve as Finance Office points of contact in the event documents need to be retrieved for Financial Statement (FS) audits,

Office of the Inspector General (OIG) audits, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, etc. Having all three individuals retain a complete travel package mitigates the risk of not being able to retrieve a copy of the travel package while maintaining compliance with the Travel Record Retention Policy. Although the recommendation is to have all three individuals maintain a complete travel package, Line/Staff Offices may define which of these three individuals has the ultimate responsibility for retaining the documents so long as the office is in compliance with the record retention requirements as outlined below. Specific Line/Staff Office procedures will need to be documented, reviewed and approved by the NOAA CFO if they deviate from the recommended approach defined in this Policy.

Travelers, Voucher Preparers, and/or Approving Officials are designated as the document retention officials for travel documents and will be responsible for ensuring travel documents they prepare or approve are retained in accordance with both the NOAA Travel Regulation (NTR), Chapter 301-52.32, and Federal record retention requirements. As such these documents must be retained in accordance with Function Number 400 Maintenance and Disposition of Finance and Fiscal Functional Files of NOAA records control schedules. Specifically, NOAA, item 403-15, cites that travel files must be maintained for 6 years and 3 months after the period covering the account. These files must be shredded to safeguard against unauthorized disclosure of Personally Identifiable Information (PII) contained in the records. However, if these records are subject to an on-going investigation or pending litigation, then they cannot be destroyed until the litigation hold is lifted by General Counsel even if the retention period for these records has expired.

The policy for non-routing (Excepted and Invitational) travel vouchers remains in place as today with one slight modification. The current process requires the original document with ink signature to be forwarded to the servicing Finance Office. With the implementation of Post As Approved, a photo-copy of the signed voucher with receipts should be forwarded to the appropriate servicing Finance Office. Originals should be kept in the field.

If the Finance Office requires a copy of the complete travel package, the servicing Finance Branch will request the travel documents on an “*as needed*” basis for purposes to include but not limited to:

- a. Random audit sampling related to annual DOC FS audit;
- b. Congressional, Departmental and/or FOIA requests; and
- c. Record retention compliance.

The Traveler, Voucher Preparer, and/or Approving Official as defined within this policy and/or the specific Line/Staff Office travel document record retention procedures will be required to forward a copy of the complete travel package in accordance with NTR, Chapter 301-52.32 to the servicing Finance Branch within five (5) business days of the audit request or within a reasonable timeframe if the records were transferred to the Federal Records Center (FRC).

To reduce the burden of paper storage, Travelers, Voucher Preparers, and/or Approving Officials may work with their Line/Staff Office designated NOAA Records Liaison Officer to transfer inactive travel files to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Federal

Records Centers (FRC's) facilities located across the country for temporary storage. Although Line/Staff Offices have the option of storing these records in-house, they should consider retaining the inactive travel files in-house for 3 years, and then transferring them to the FRC for the remaining 3 years and 3 months to conserve space. Records scheduled to be destroyed within 1 year of the 6 year 3 month retention period should not be sent to the FRC.

Electronically scanning the original receipts and keeping them for the required retention period is an acceptable alternative to paper storage provided a file back-up process is in place for safeguarding records and NOAA policies regarding PII and sensitive data are followed. Please reference NARA General Records Schedule 20 – Electronic Records, Item 3 Electronic Records That Replace Temporary Hard Copy Records accordingly. Retrieval of electronically scanned copies must take into consideration the:

1. Ease of access if needed for audit or any other purposes; and
2. Ability to identify the travel voucher and traveler the receipts are associated with as they would need to be submitted together upon request.

Contact Information.

Policy updates regarding travel voucher submission/record retention are posted via this transmittal which is posted on the NOAA Travel Office (NTO) website at <http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/~finance/travel.html>. Please visit our website to view or to update your NTR.

For policy questions, please contact:
Chasity.N.Donaldson@noaa.gov/ (301) 444-2129 or
Rachael.S.Wivell@noaa.gov/(301) 444-2136

For ITM system questions, please contact:
clientservices@noaa.gov/(301)444-3400, Option 2.

For additional information on record retention and record storage, please contact NOAA's Records Officer:

andre.sivels@noaa.gov/(301)713-3540, ext -213

For more information on records management please visit the NOAA Records Management webpage at http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/audit/records_management/.