**Frequently Asked Questions Regarding   
Official & Personal Travel**

***Question 1****: Is it appropriate for an employee who is on annual or administrative leave to officially represent NOAA at a conference and pay any or all of his or her own expenses?*

***Answer 1****:* No. To the extent that an employee is conducting official NOAA business at a conference, the employee must be placed on travel orders and is entitled to his or her per diem, lodging and travel expenses for any and all days that the employee is representing NOAA; NOAA cannot ask an employee to pay any of these expenses. An employee may pay for his or her own expenses associated with attending a conference only for those portions of the conference where the employee is on administrative or annual leave.

***Question 2****: Are* *employees are permitted to “bunk up” in hotel rooms to reduce the agency’s expenses?*

***Answer 2****:* Yes. While NOAA may not require employees to share rooms, under the Federal Travel Regulations, should an employee choose to share accommodations with another employee also on official travel, the employee’s reimbursement is limited to one-half of the double occupancy rate.

***Question 3****: Is it appropriate for NOAA to send an employee to only some of the days of a conference on official travel and permit the employee to take leave for the remainder?*

***Answer 3****:* Yes, so long as the employee is taking annual leave.

NOAA can determine that attendance of the employee at just part of a conference is a necessary expense. Where NOAA has made the determination that attendance of the employee at part of a conference is appropriate, the employee cannot be granted administrative leave to attend the remainder. If the employee wants to attend the remainder of the conference at his or her own expense, the employee must take annual leave.

NOAA may place employees on administrative leave only if an employee wants to attend an *entire* conference at his or her own expense and NOAA makes the appropriate findings related to the employee’s attendance at the conference contributing to the goals of the Department. While on administrative leave, an employee cannot use his or her official title because he/she is not officially representing NOAA at the conference.

***Question 4****: What logistical steps must the employee take with their hotel accommodations, rental car, etc. if the employee is converting from official travel to annual leave in order to attend part of a conference?*

***Answer 4****:* Whether an employee must check out of the hotel and re-register depends on whether the employee uses a government travel card and the flexibility of the hotel.

If the employee is using his/her own credit card to cover the expenses and will be reimbursed by the government only for those days that the employee was authorized to stay in the hotel pursuant to his/her travel orders, the employee need not check out and re-register. The employee may even continue to stay at the hotel at the government rate so long as the hotel generally extends that rate to Federal employees traveling in their personal capacity.

However, the answer may be more complicated for employees with government travel cards. Since an employee who uses a government travel card is prohibited from using the card to pay personal travel expenses, the employee must ensure that only the portion of the hotel stay that is associated with official government work (*e.g.*, the portion of the hotel stay that was covered by the employee’s travel orders) is charged to the government travel card. The portion of the hotel stay that is associated with the employee’s choice to stay at the conference, however, must be paid by the employee separately. Thus, it is really a function of the flexibility of the hotel that will determine whether the employee must check out and re-register.

A similar set of considerations would apply in the context of a rental car. For that time period in which the employee is on leave, the employee must pay for the rental car on their own and not on a government travel card. Likewise, an employee may continue to use the rental car at a government rate so long as the rental car company generally extends that rate to Federal employees traveling in their personal capacity.

***Question 5****: May NOAA pay for the return flight of an employee that converts from official travel to annual leave in order to attend part of a conference?*

***Answer 5****:* Yes. Since the government has authorized travel to and from the conference in order to attend the approved portion of the conference, the employee may interrupt this travel by taking annual leave to attend the remainder of the conference and the government must still pay for the return flight to which the employee was originally entitled. Any additional expenses, however, that accrue due to the employee’s choice to interrupt the travel are the employee’s to bear.

***Question 6****: Is continued use of NOAA credentials appropriate when an employee has converted to annual leave in order to attend part of a conference?*

***Answer 6****:* No. For those employees choosing to stay at the conference at his or her own expense, continued use of the official title on any credentials is inappropriate because the employee is now attending the conference in his/her personal capacity. As such, either a new credential should be issued or the affiliation with NOAA should be removed.

***Question 7****: Must a meeting or conference fee be split pro-rata between the government and the employee in proportion to the amount of time on official travel versus annual leave?*

***Answer 7****:*  It depends.If NOAA must pay the entire meeting/conference fee regardless of how much of the conference the employee attends, then no, the employee may not pay a pro-rata share of the fee. If, however, NOAA is able to pay just that portion of the fee associated with the official travel of the employee, then yes, the employee would have to pay the pro-rata share since attendance has now become a personal expense.

***Question 8****: What is the status of the employee under the Federal Employees’ Compensation Act (FECA) and Federal Torts Claims Act (FTCA) when an employee has converted to annual leave in order to attend part of a conference?*

***Answer 8****:* If the employee is on annual leave, that employee is now outside the scope of the employee-employer relationship and is thus outside the scope of the FECA and FTCA.