

## DoD to Field New Travel System

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**W**ASHINGTON — Doin' the TDY checklist. Request orders. Call travel. Make rental car, hotel and airline reservations. Get a cash advance. Pick up tickets. Pack. Go. Come back. Save receipts. File voucher. Check mail for travel pay. There is relief in sight.

The Defense Department's new temporary duty travel system, slated to be fielded worldwide by 2001, is "quicker, easier and better" than the current system with all its forms and vouchers, according to Army Col. Albert E. Arnold III.

Arnold, head of the Defense Travel System Project Management Office here, said the new computer-based system streamlines the entire travel process. Everything from getting orders to making hotel and airline reservations to filing reimbursement vouchers is done electronically.

In keeping with efforts to reinvent government, defense finance officials have revamped the military's \$3-billion-a-year travel system. They've cut the joint TDY travel regulations down to about 20 pages of simple English. They've developed what they call a "seamless, paperless system," which will be field-tested later this year in one of DoD's 19 travel regions.

### Less Paperwork

"Everyone will love it," Arnold promised. "Travelers will be able to make reservations right from their desktops. Where today you talk to the travel agent by phone or in person, you'll be able to see all your choices right on your desktop." Travelers with no access to a computer at work will be able to make their travel arrangements and file their travel vouchers at their unit's administrative center.

Getting reimbursed for travel expenses will also be faster and easier, he said. "You'll just file your voucher straight from your desktop without inputting travel data a second time."

Currently, the trip destination and other information are first entered onto a DD Form 1610 travel order. Travel specialists create an itinerary with the same information. Once the temporary duty is com-

plete, the specific travel details are entered onto a DD Form 1351-2 voucher.

With the new system, the information will be entered into a database once. Some information, such as accounting classifications, will be preloaded into the program to be selected from pull-down menus. Returning travelers will have to update only changes to their itinerary, Arnold said.

Once the voucher is complete, the traveler will electronically forward it to one of his direct supervisors for approval. "The beauty of the system is that it will be a completely paperless process from end to end," he noted.

The new system also eliminates the need for filing receipts for travel expenses. The receipts must be maintained, but they need not be filed with the voucher. Travelers must keep receipts for all lodging costs and for expenses over \$75, Arnold said. "The honor system now covers expenses under \$75.

"You will keep your own receipts, much the same way you file your income taxes today," he said. "You send in your IRS Form 1040, but you don't send in your shoebox full of justification. The same thing will happen for this. You'll send in your voucher electronically, and by law, keep your receipts for six years and three months.

"Should somebody want to see them in the future — the authorizing official, your boss, a reviewer or auditor — then you'll need to produce them, much the same as you do for your income tax. If you get audited by the IRS and you can't produce a receipt, you lose. The same thing will be true for the defense travel system."

### Honesty's the Best Policy

The new system is based on the premise that both travelers and supervisors are honest and responsible, Arnold said. In revamping the system, defense officials eliminated layers of approval authorities, giving supervisors authority to approve temporary duty travel and travel vouchers. Each agency and organization will determine where this authority will be vested, but it should go to the lowest-level supervisor that has the responsibility and resources (time,

people, and travel budget) to perform the given mission.

"The person who's now going to review your claim for payment is going to be your first-line supervisor," Arnold said. "He or she knows how much he or she can trust you. They're going to look at your claim, much the same way the Defense Finance and Accounting Service does today."

There will, however, be random- and post-payment voucher audits. This is a change from the current system, where each voucher is checked prior to payment, he said. "Because we've simplified the entitlements, the computer system can now make all the computations and check everything to make sure it's right."

Another change to the system eliminates the need to certify official telephone calls, a requirement dating back to 1939. Under the new system, he said, official telephone calls will be listed as a separate reimbursable expense on travel vouchers.

### Easy-to-Use Software

Defense officials are planning an extensive training program to acquaint travelers with the new procedures, Arnold said. "Our office will train trainers in different units around the world who will then train their units. They can then incorporate any local procedures that might be necessary." Online help will also be available, he added.

"The system is going to be very easy to use. If you use Word or WordPerfect today, you'll be able to use the defense travel system tomorrow," he said. Field tests will ensure the system works for everyone in all the Services, he added.

Defense officials conducted pilot tests at 27 sites throughout the Services. Results included a 65-percent drop in administrative costs and a 31-percent cut in reimbursement time. Customer satisfaction improved dramatically.

"We started testing the system at Fort Huachuca, Ariz., at the Joint Interoperability Test Command in November," Arnold said. Feedback was positive, but there were some glitches. "We're tweaking those things to make sure the system we provide is exactly what we want."

DoD's POW/Missing Personnel Affairs Office in Washington was another of the pilot test sites. Budget officer Angela M. Talaber there praised the new

electronic system, particularly the speed with which people are paid – in some cases, within a day or two.

"If finance pays the voucher in the afternoon, most times the money goes to the Federal Reserve Bank the next day," Talaber said. "Within two days the money is direct-deposited in the traveler's bank account. I've had folks who filed a voucher at 7 a.m., and it was processed and paid the same day." Compared to the old ways of doing business, this is a dramatic improvement, she said.

"Before, it was a frustrating, time-consuming paper process," Talaber said. "You filled out a seven-page carbon form and attached all the little bits of trash paper you saved during your trip – receipts for everything. Then you sent it to finance, where it sat in an in-box until somebody got ready to look at it. Then two weeks to three months later, you got a check in the mail."

The travel system is being lab-tested to ensure all the technology works, Arnold said. "We're really kicking the tires to make sure the system works the way we want it to work before we field it to anyone else."

Early this year, the system will go to Whiteman Air Force Base, Mo., for further testing, he said. After testing ends by early summer, about 200,000 servicemembers and defense civilians will begin using the new travel system in Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

By 2000, defense officials expect to put the system at bases overseas. They expect to employ the system throughout the Defense Department by 2001.

"We'd love to be able to give it to everybody tomorrow morning," Arnold said. "Just flip the switch and you're up and running. But, because of the cultural and process changes involved, there's a significant amount of training that we want to provide so that people know how to use the system. It will take some time to get to all three million people in the Department of Defense."

**Editor's Note:** This information is in the public domain at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news>. For more information about the new system, visit the Defense Travel System Project Office Home Page at <http://www.dtic.mil/travelink/> on the Internet.