

Moving and Relocation

GSA Compiles Relocation ‘Best Practices’ from Private Industry Expertise

While the private sector sometimes looks to the federal government for guidance on how to treat fringe benefits like relocation allowances, the reverse happens as well. The General Services Administration (GSA) — the federal agency that oversees travel and relocation policy — published a final rule April 1 that integrates some private industry “best practices” into its relocation regulations. (See Tab 1000 of the *Guide* for more on moving and relocation fringe benefits.)

New Definitions, 50-mile Rule

The final rule concludes a project the GSA started in 2002 when it set out to collect private industry “benchmarks” in the area of employee relocation benefits, including home sale assistance. It adds or changes common terms, such as “amended value sale,” “buyer value option,” “household goods” and others. The new rule also aligns the GSA guidance with that of the IRS’s Publication 521, *Moving Expenses*, when it comes to how many miles must be added to an employee’s regular commute (at least 50 miles) in a qualified move.

In the preamble to the final rule, the GSA stated the new guidance “would improve the overall management of government relocation programs and reduce costs.”

Other areas the final rule covers include:

- house-hunting trip per diems;
- mode of transportation for house-hunting trips;
- lump sum payments for temporary quarters subsistence expenses (TQSE);
- certification of TQSE expenses; and
- limits on the amount of time that household goods can be temporarily stored.

No Double Dipping

The final rule prescribes a “duplicate reimbursement disclosure statement,” which an employee signs to state that neither the employee nor any of his or her family members has accepted (nor will accept) any duplicate reimbursements for relocation expenses.

Househunting Trips

The final rule states that when the new official station is less than 250 miles from the old one, the required

mode of transportation is a privately owned vehicle (POV) — that is, the employee’s vehicle in most cases — unless there are acceptable reasons for not using a POV; for example, the employee is physically impaired, or does not own or lease a POV. For longer trips, the preferred mode is common carrier, such as a train or airliner.

The final rule makes the continental United States (CONUS) per diem rates (see ¶754) the operative rates for calculating actual expenses incurred on househunting trips.

Background

The final rule, which took into account public comments collected late in 2004, urges federal agencies to adopt a “comprehensive relocation management system.” The GSA has published the findings and recommendations of the board it chartered in 2004 — called the Governmentwide Relocation Advisory Board, or GRAB — on its website (see *Finding out More*), along with supporting documents. The GRAB, in turn, had incorporated findings and recommendations from a committee that the GSA had appointed in 2002, consisting of government officials and “private sector experts.”

Model policy language is set out in the final rule, and in Section 302 of the Federal Travel Regulations (see *Finding out More*).

Finding out More

The final rule takes into account public comments solicited by the GSA in announcing its 2004 proposed rule. The proposed rule was published in the *Federal Register* at 69 Fed. Reg. 68111 in November 2004.

The final rule is published at 76 Fed. Reg. 18325 (April 1, 2011).

The GSA’s findings and recommendations can be accessed at <http://www.gsa.gov/grab>.

For clarification of the rule’s content, employers may call Pam Silvis-Zelasko, GSA Office of Travel, Transportation and Asset Management, in Washington, D.C., at (202) 219-7749 or send an e-mail to pamela.silvis-zelasko@gsa.gov. 