

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

December 2010



Objective

To determine whether Social Security Administration (SSA) employees complied with Federal Travel Regulations and the Agency's policy on the use of (1) discounted airfares; (2) coach-class service (or its equivalent); and (3) the automated reservation system to make air travel reservations.

Background

SSA's Division of Travel Management develops and revises SSA's official travel policies for Agency employees. SSA employees are required to select the method of travel most advantageous to the Agency. SSA employees are required to purchase discounted airfares and coach-class accommodations through SSA's contracted travel agency and use GetThere, an on-line reservation tool that allows SSA employees to make travel reservations for official business.

To view the full report, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO/BEPDF/A-02-09-29089.pdf>

Social Security Administration Employees' Use of Discounted Airfares ***(A-02-09-29089)***

Our Findings

Most SSA employees used discounted Government fares as required. Of the ticketed reservations made when a Government fare was available, 86 percent was purchased at or below the Government fare. While most SSA employees flew at or below the Government fare, a smaller percentage of SSA employees in our sample purchased airline tickets at the discounted Government fare when compared to employees at other Federal agencies.

SSA employees purchased coach seats when flying on official business, as required. SSA employees did not use GetThere for all reservations. More than half the reservations that could have been made using GetThere was made by calling an agent instead, which resulted in SSA being charged higher transaction fees.

Airlines typically provide their lowest fares through their own Websites. Accordingly, the same flight may cost less if purchased from the airline's Webpage when compared to purchasing it via the Agency's contracted travel agent. Since SSA employees must use the Agency's contracted travel agent, they cannot always take advantage of the airlines' most discounted fare available without facing the possibility of disciplinary action.

Our Recommendations

We recommend that SSA:

1. Continue to educate and periodically remind employees of their responsibilities to ensure all air travel complies with pertinent policies and regulations, is properly authorized, and is being performed in the most economical and advantageous manner, including using GetThere to make airline reservations.
2. Change its policies to allow employees to purchase airline tickets that save Agency funds if the employee is willing to assume responsibility for any cancellation fees.

SSA agreed with one of our recommendations.