

GSA Unfreezes Federal Per Diems

By Eric Katz August 30, 2013

Federal employees will receive a small increase in their per diems starting in October, the General Services Administration announced Friday.

Federal agencies will reimburse their employees traveling in "standard" areas of the continental United States up to \$129 per day for expenses -- \$83 for lodging and \$46 for meals and incidentals -- in fiscal 2014. The lodging per diem increased from \$77 in fiscal 2013, while the meals portion held steady. GSA did not increase the federal per diem last year.

GSA's per diem is about 5 percent lower than the average daily rate of the market, the agency said. While the rate applies to about 2,600 counties, 400 additional "non-standard areas" -- or NSAs -- receive individual calculations. Feds traveling in cities with high costs of living, such as New York City, receive inflated reimbursements, for example.

Some of the NSAs, such as Washington, D.C., will actually see a reduction in their per diem rates, while others will receive an increase.

GSA also announced the elimination of the Conference Lodging Allowance, which let federal travelers spend 25 percent more than per diem rates for conferences. The move will save the government \$10 million in fiscal 2014, GSA said.

The agency also recently <u>announced</u> new airfare rates for federal employees through its City Pair Program, estimating they will save \$2.2 billion annually. The Obama administration has targeted federal travel as a means to cut spending, directing agencies to reduce travel costs by 30 percent.

The directive has led to \$2 billion in savings across government, GSA said. Still, the agency made clear federal employees must occasionally travel to accomplish their core missions.

"For many public servants, travel is a necessary part of their jobs," GSA <u>wrote</u> in a blog post announcing the new per diem rates. "As each agency reviews its travel and conference-related activities, each agency must ensure that any spending serves the American people as efficiently and effectively as possible."

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