

GSA TRAVEL ADVISORY #7
January 30, 2003

Clarification of providing light refreshments at Government sponsored conferences

Dear Federal Travelers, Federal Travel Managers, and Federal Conference Planners:

The Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) allows agencies to pay for “light refreshments” at Government-sponsored conferences. A conference is defined as a meeting retreat, seminar, symposium, or event that involves attendee travel.

In our Q&A’s on conferences, we state that the FTR only covers conferences that involve travel and that [the majority of the conference attendees have to be in travel status in order to provide light refreshments at Government expense. If a majority is not in a travel status, then the rule doesn't apply.](#)

A recent decision of the Comptroller General of the United States (B-288266, January 27, 2003) states that “GSA does not have the authority to authorize agencies to pay for light refreshments for those not in a travel status.” The decision further states that “certifying officers should not rely on GSA’s travel regulation on conference planning to authorize light refreshments at meetings for employees in nontravel status.”

GSA plans to discuss favorable resolution of this issue with the General Accounting Office, which could involve amendment of the affected portions of the FTR and related guidance. Accordingly, until such time as GSA resolves this issue, agencies are advised that providing light refreshments during conference breaks cannot be provided to individuals in a nontravel status at Government expense under the authority of the FTR. If you have questions about the FTR, or need additional information, please contact: Jim Harte at 202-501-0483. Or e-mail Jim at James.Harte@gsa.gov.