



August 28, 2003

Mr. John Pettit
NASA

Dear Mr. Pettit:

This morning you inquired with me regarding the use of official passports for U.S. Government employees traveling abroad for Government business. Specifically you wished to know if there were any regulations requiring U.S. Government employees to exclusively use an official passport when abroad on Government business.

Title 22 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Section 53.3(b) states:

"An official passport is issued to an official or employee of the U.S. Government proceeding abroad in the discharge of official duties. Where appropriate, dependents of such persons may be issued official passports."

It is implicit in this regulation and our general stated policy, that when a person is traveling abroad on behalf of the U.S. Government the individual does so using an official passport. Reciprocally, the U.S. Government requires employees of foreign governments to use their versions of official passports when they come to this country on behalf of their government. This is a traditional practice among governments and an internationally recognized policy.

Also, the United States is a signatory to the multilateral Vienna Convention on Diplomatic and Consular Relations the terms of which lays out how our consular representatives and government officials are to be documented when assigned or traveling on official business to other signatory countries.

There are also several other reasons why an official passport should be used when traveling on behalf of the U.S. Government:

- Today, most foreign governments will not issue visas to persons who state the purpose of travel as U.S. Government business and present a tourist passport. Foreign governments look askance at individuals to appear to be hiding their true purpose of travel. Oftentimes when such an incident occurs the Department receives a complaint from the Foreign Ministry of the country involved. Obviously the U.S. Government prefers that such complaints not be lodged.
- Many countries will also deny entry to individuals to state they are traveling on official business but present a tourist passport. This contravenes the entry requirements of foreign governments and sometimes is seen as an attempt to violate their national sovereignty by misrepresenting the true purpose for which the traveler has entered the country.
- Failure to use the correct documentation can lead to serious breaches to reciprocity agreements we have with foreign countries. These agreements are hard-won and are intrinsically important in smoothing the way business is done between ourselves and various foreign governments.
- Failure to enter a country using an official passport can lead to difficulties on leaving the particular country. U.S. Government employees have been detained on departure by foreign immigration officials for failing to enter the country for official business using the correct passport.
- Most importantly, security concerns mandate that official travelers identify themselves as such. In the event of an emergency or other problems bearers of official passports have quicker access to host government and thus, greater protection. It also assists our consular officials abroad to verify an individual's affiliation should problems arise or in the event of an emergency.

I hope this will be of assistance to you. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact myself or the Director of this Agency, Barbara Chesman.

Sincerely,

Randall J. Beyins
Assistant Director
Special Issuance Agency