

Impact of NASA Travel Restrictions on Civil Servant Scientists at NASA Centers

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At NASA/Goddard we deal with 2 restrictions:

- 1) Limit on total dollars per year allowed to be spent for travel (not including flight projects in development)
 - An annual travel dollar limit is imposed on all travel (conference, ground-based telescope observing runs, suborbital balloon and sounding rocket campaigns, science team meetings, and travel by Projects in operation such as HST, Fermi, Swift etc). We are restricted in the use of our Project funds which have been peer reviewed or previously agreed to by NASA's annual budget process.
 - This expenditure limit has become less of a problem due to item #2 below. If conference restrictions were loosened, then we would start hitting our travel ceiling; a Catch-22
- 2) Conference attendance restrictions
 - Numerous impacts on next slide

Impact of NASA conference restrictions on NASA civil servants

- Restricts our ability to meet with the community and disseminate information about NASA's missions and scientific results.
 - ✧ This runs counter to the National Aeronautics and Space Act of 1958, which states (sec 203) that a function of NASA is to: "provide for the widest practicable and appropriate dissemination of information concerning its activities and the results thereof."
- Restricts our ability to stay apprised of the latest results in the development of new technologies, which may be applied to NASA's missions
- Restricts career growth of younger scientists, and has had some negative impact on recruitment of new staff.
- Lowers morale of scientists; conferences provide a venue for the exchange of ideas and is an essential part of being a scientist.
- Cedes international leadership in space science. If we don't show up, we are not a player.

Impact of NASA conference restrictions on NASA civil servants:

Some practical issues

- Decisions on who is allowed to attend are often made very late; prevents getting early registration fees and disrupts scientists' ability to plan their schedules.
- Uncertainty in knowing whether or not we can attend a conference often prevents us from accepting invitations to give plenary or keynote talks (these offers are usually extended 6 months before the meeting).
- Legislation restricts NASA from sending more than 50 civil servants to foreign conferences. NASA voluntarily extended that restriction to include all NASA direct-funded contractors during sequestration, and has not rescinded it. This is a huge restriction on both groups. Only half of the NASA attendees at the recent SPIE meeting in Montreal were civil servants. 75% of the civil servants in astrophysics at Goddard that had accepted talks/posters were denied attendance.
- Requires inordinate amount of paperwork by Goddard science management, resulting in less time to work on important research and mission issues.