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Desktop Workshop

Personal Liability While Driving a GOV

You can download a copy of this presentation at: <https://www.gsa.gov/gsa-fleet-training>

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March, 2024

What happens if you cause a vehicle accident while driving a GOV?

Can I be sued?

Am I covered by insurance?

Do I have the right policies in place to protect my employees



Ultimate Question of the Session

Are you personally liable if you are involved in a vehicle accident, while driving a Government Vehicle and are at fault?

- Includes all GOVs
 - GSA leased
 - Agency-owned
 - Tactical, non-tactical and Special Purpose vehicles



US Army M1142 Tactical Firefighting Truck

Personal Liability Disclaimer

The information provided in this presentation **DOES NOT** constitute legal advice as any such advice would need to be based upon an analysis of law applied to specific facts by your agency.

For specific guidance contact your Agency Fleet Manager and/or your agency's General Counsel (Legal Office)

- Because each agency may handle liability differently

YouTube Search, please look for the most recent posted presentation, it has the most up to date information

Why is this training important

- Knowledge is power
 - The more you know/understand about the liability topic, you can better protect yourself and your agency
- Always on Offense
 - When you are on offense you are better prepared to meet the challenges of your everyday operations
 - You don't have to worry about being on defense

Roadmap

- Part 1
 - Your Responsibilities when using a GOV
 - Official Use/Misuse
 - Permissible/Impermissible Use
- Part 2
 - Scope of Employment
 - Liability Assigned
 - Federal Tort Claims Act
- Part 3
 - Privately Owned Vehicles on Government Business
 - Rental Cars – Liability/Official Business

What are my Responsibilities when I use a GOV?

- You must obey all motor vehicle traffic laws of the state and local jurisdiction except where the duties of your position require otherwise. (41 CFR 102-34.235)
- If you are fined for an offense you commit while performing your official duties, but was not required as part of your official duties, payment is your personal responsibility. (CFR 41 102-34-235)

What are my responsibilities when I use a GOV?

- If you receive a parking/moving violation while operating a GOV, you are responsible for paying the fine and will not be reimbursed (41 CFR 102-34.245)
 - Cannot use appropriated funds to pay the fines
 - Agency Driver is responsible
 - Consider having a vehicle driver log



What are my Responsibilities when I use a GOV?

- You must pay parking fees and tolls while operating a motor vehicle owned or leased by the Government.
 - You can expect to be reimbursed for parking/toll fees while performing official duties (CFR 41 102-34.240)
- If you receive a Toll Violation Notice
 - Work with the respective State Toll Authority to pay the fee
 - In most cases appropriated funds can be used to pay tolls

Official Use

- Official use is using a Government motor vehicle to perform your agency's mission(s) as authorized by your agency. (41 CFR 102-34.200)
 - Agency Lead makes the decision
 - Incidental use must be authorized
 - What is incidental use?
- Incidental use may be a taxable benefit.
 - <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p5137.pdf> (Page 36)

Official Use

- Agency Lead (cont.)
 - Approval authority to authorize non-Federal individuals to accompany you in a GOV
 - Family Members
 - Candidates (recruits) for Military
 - Contractors

Official Use

- What is OK for one agency may not be OK for another
 - GOV parked at Costco, driver seen buying dog food
 - GOV parked at a pawnshop that sells guns/ammunition
 - GOV parked at the local grocery/home improvement store

Official Use

- You may not use a GOV for transportation between your residence and place of employment **UNLESS** it is approved in writing by your agency head (41 CFR 102-34.205, 41 CFR 102-5) * Using Agency is responsible to maintain documentation
- **CAN NOT BE DELEGATED** (41 CFR 102-5.40)
- Who is the Agency Head?
 - “The Highest Official of a Federal Agency”

Official Use

- Home to work authorizations **MUST** be renewed.
 - Renewal intervals vary based on the type of Home to Work authorized
 - Two (2) years for field work, updated as necessary
 - Fifteen (15) days for other circumstances
 - Reference 41 CFR 102-5.60 ***HOW LONG ARE INITIAL DETERMINATIONS EFFECTIVE?***

Official Use

- If an emergency has occurred, may employees drive Government motor Vehicles home?
 - **ONLY** if the head of the agency has authorized home to work transportation for employees in an emergency
 - Must be in writing
 - Initial determination cannot be effective for more than 15 days.
- Determinations should be completed before an employee is provided home to work transportation
- Consult your agency fleet manager for agency specific guidance

Official Use

- Most recent change in 41 CFR 102-5.20: Home to Work
 - Rewritten to clarify employees using vehicles in conjunction with **Official Travel** from coverage by the regulation.
 - Not meant to give blanket authority to take a vehicle home prior to a TDY. Allows taking a GOV home if the use is more advantageous to the Government

Official Use

- Follow your agency's guidance on official travel.
 - Make sure you have written approval **BEFORE** you take the GOV home
- Approval should be on an **Official Travel Order**
 - DTS
 - My Travel *FY2025
 - CONCUR
 - E2
 - Agency-Specific System for Authorizing TDY Travel

Official Use

- **Second change: §102-5.20 Home to Work**
 - Updated; employee use of vehicles between work and mass transit facilities is not covered by the regulation
- **GOV use between work and mass transit facilities is now covered under 41 CFR 102-34-210**
 - Head of Agency must make determination in writing valid for 1 year
 - No safe and reliable commercial or duplicative Federal mass transportation service that serves the same route
 - Transportation is made available, to other Federal employees
 - AFV's should be used to the maximum extent practicable

Permissible Use of GOV

- Making rounds of area worksites
- Attending official meetings
- Attending official training
- Going on official errands (e.g. post office, Court, car maintenance, car washes)
- TDY station to hotel



Permissible Use of GOV while on TDY

- Going to drug/grocery store, barber shop,
- Attend worship services and eating at restaurants
- Visiting a laundromat or dry cleaner
- Similar places necessary for the sustenance, comfort or health of employee
 - Hard to define
 - What about extended TDYs?
 - Will be agency specific

APPROVED

Examples of Impermissible use of GOV

- Going to a private social function
 - (birthday/retirement party, bar, strip club)
- Transporting people not authorized to be in the GOV
 - May not be covered under the Federal Tort Claims Act
- Doing personal errands
 - If you are in a leadership position, do not send your subordinates to do personal errands



Examples of Impermissible use of GOV

- Engaging in entertainment activities while on TDY (mall/movie)
- Attending local sporting events/attractions
- Picking up hitchhikers
 - What about cold weather states??
 - Recommend you have a policy on how to address emergency situations.



Examples of Impermissible use of GOV

- Carrying medicinal marijuana in a GOV for a patient
 - Currently any use of marijuana is not legal under Federal law (Controlled Substances Act (CSA) (21 U.S.C. § 811)
 - Even though legal in some states, it is still illegal according to the Federal Government
- Carrying a personally owned firearm in a GOV
 - Generally speaking, you cannot carry a privately owned firearm in a GOV unless you are performing a LE mission
 - Consult your agency Fleet Manager or General counsel for specific information/authorization

Penalty for misuse of a GOV

“If an employee willfully uses, or authorizes the use of a GOV for other than official purposes, the employee is subject to suspension of at least 1 month or, up to and including removal by the head of the agency”

41 CFR 102-34.225 (31 U.S.C. § 1349.)

“What if”

- But Devin you said, “You cannot use a GOV to engage in entertainment activities while on TDY (mall/movie)”
 - What if the restaurant is in the mall, can I eat there then go see a movie?
 - What if I park on the other side of the street, can I go to the mall to shop or watch a movie?
 - What if I drink alcohol during dinner, can I drive a GOV as long as my blood alcohol content is below the legal limit?



“What if”

- Perception is reality
 - You are a target for scrutiny when driving a GOV
 - People are looking for you to “do something wrong” and will report you
- **DON'T EVER DRINK ALCOHOL AND DRIVE**
- Be prepared to justify your actions
 - Don't risk it.



Permissible? Or Impermissible?

- Incident reported to “Howsmydriving@gsa.gov”

To whom it may concern:

On 22 October 2021 at 8:45 AM, vehicle GXX-XXXXX was seen at the Fine Wine and Good Spirits Store, (address redacted) *Fine Wine and Good Spirits is a Pennsylvania Based Liquor store

The Soldier (name redacted) got out of the vehicle, stood in line and purchased at least one bottle of “A Midwinter Night’s Dram” Rye Whiskey.

Additionally, it appears the soldier was there with his supervisor, the supervisor was in civilian clothes talking to another customer saying something to the effect of, “sending him down to Kentucky, on orders, when the PX gets a specific whiskey”



Permissible? Or Impermissible?

Incident reported to Howsmysdriving@gsa.gov

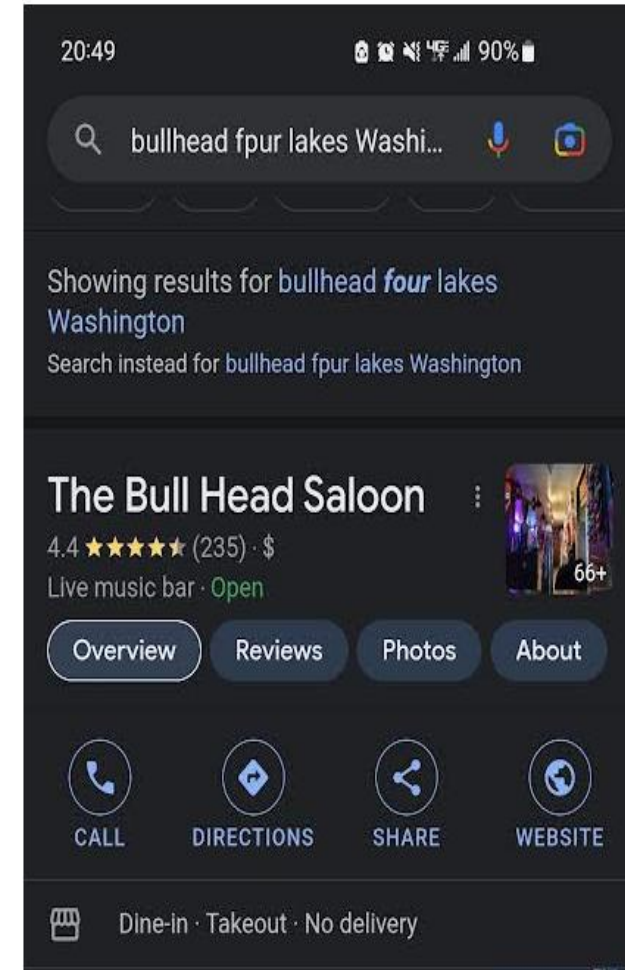
Official use and Possible DUI

- “Call me crazy but 2 government vehicles and their drivers are at a bar drinking is a bad thing”

“July 8, 2023, 2000 hours or longer Chevy Equinox with Guard Markings
Chrysler van with Guard Markings”

“ I have attached pictures of the vehicles 2 with plates and showing the bar sign.”

Permissible? Or Impermissible?



What happens when there is an Accident?

- An Investigation is started, information to find out:
 - Was the Government employee negligent?
 - Obey laws, speeding, under the influence of drugs/alcohol, texting, talking on cell phone
- Were they in their Scope of Employment?
 - What does “Scope of Employment” mean?

Scope of Employment

- Legal Term – activity authorized by a competent authority (supervisor, standard operating procedure, policy, orders) and was serving, at least in part, a government purpose
- Determined by state law where accident occurs
 - Critical Component
- Under circumstances where the US, if a private person, would be liable to the claimant under state law
 - i.e., would a civilian be liable if they were driving

Reference <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R45732.pdf> for more information

Scope of Employment Factors

- Time, place and occasion of accident
 - Normal business hours – What is normal?
- Act commonly done by such employee?
 - Do others in the office perform a similar function?
- The extent of departure from normal methods of performance?
 - How far out of line did the driver go?
- Act the employer could reasonably have anticipated?

Scope of Employment Factors

- Act motivated to serve employer or was it personal
 - Within general authority given by employer
 - In furtherance of employer's business
 - For accomplishment of objective which employed
- Justice Department makes final decision **

Out of Scope of Employment Examples

- Commuting to and from work (depending on state laws)
- Intoxicated or willful negligence – generally not in scope
- Using vehicle without permission
- Deviating from route – generally not in scope
- Accident occurred when NOT doing something to promote the mission of the agency – generally not in scope

* Vehicle Accident Pictures coming up in the next few slides.

Scope of Employment Case Study

Essig v. United States of America - 1987



Scope of Employment Outcome

- The Court Ruled:
 - The agent was not merely going to his home to engage in his own business, but was acting in furtherance of his employers business by going home with the understanding he would receive a call from a fellow agent who would accompany him on the meeting
- The history of the relationship between Hamill and the DEA is consistent with a finding that Hamill was within the scope of his employment at the time of the accident

Scope of Employment Outcome

- Just because Mr. Hamill was acting within his scope of employment didn't mean he was free and clear.
 - Arrested and charged with:
 - Leaving the scene of an accident
 - Reckless endangerment
 - He pled guilty to those charges

Scope of Employment/State Law Singleton V Bruchfield Feb 25 2005



Liability

- What does the term Liability mean?
- How does it impact you if you are found at fault?
- Will you have to pay for the damage?



Liability Assigned

- If you were driving a GOV and faulted for causing an accident, injury and/or damage and were acting in your “Scope of Employment” you are covered under the Federal Tort Claims Act.
 - **This applies to third party claims only (i.e., the “other vehicle”)**
- If you were not acting in your scope of employment and caused an accident, injury or damage while using a GOV, you are personally liable
 - You will need a good lawyer

Federal Tort Claims Act

- Allows individuals to recover against the Federal Government for personal injury, wrongful death and property damage caused by negligence of a Federal employee acting within the scope of their employment
- Only type of relief allowed under FTCA (Federal Tort Claims Act) is money damages for a specified amount

Federal Tort Claims Act

- The Federal Employees Liability Reform and Tort Compensation Act of 1988 PL 100-694 amended the FTCA, it is the exclusive remedy for torts committed by federal employees within the scope of their employment.
- Generally speaking, you are protected from being personally sued by a third party as long as you are acting in your “Scope of Employment”

Federal Tort Claims Act

- Intentional Tort Exception
 - 28 USC provides that the FTCA does not apply to claims arising out of assault, battery, false imprisonment, false arrest, malicious prosecution, abuse of process, libel, slander, misrepresentation, deceit or interference with contract rights. However, the US may be held liable for any of the first six torts in the list if committed by an investigative or law enforcement officer of the United States Government.

Federal Tort Claims Act

- Basically, The FTCA is the Federal Government's Insurance Policy
 - Essentially, it (FTCA) substitutes the Federal Government for the individual as the defendant
 - Using/owning agency pays the third party claim if their driver is at fault and working in their Scope of Employment.

Claims Under the Federal Tort Claims Act

- If you are involved in a vehicle accident, are at fault and within your scope of employment
 - Work with your agency's Legal office
 - They are the POC agency for legal claims against the Government
 - i.e., the Air Force contact is the base's Judge Advocate General (JAG)

Liability Assigned

- What about contractors? (41 CFR 102-34.215)
 - How are they covered while driving a GSA GOV?
- Depends on how the contract is written:
 - Cost Reimbursable (leased directly from GSA) Must abide by FAR 51.2
 - Sole responsibility of Contracting Officer to ensure the requirements are met
 - FAR 51-202 requires contractors leasing directly from GSA to provide proof of vehicle liability insurance
 - Reference FAR 28.307-2 for liability insurance requirements

Liability Assigned

- Depends on how the contract is written: (continued)
 - Federal agency providing leased or owned vehicles to a contractor in performance of a contract:
 - That federal agency is responsibility to ensure contract clauses are in place to protect government's interests
 - Reference FAR 28.307-2 for information on liability insurance requirements
- Are government contractors allowed to ride in a GOV?
 - Reference slide 12

Federal Tort Claims Act

- Driving in Canada or Mexico?
- Many foreign countries, including Canada, do not recognize the U.S. Government self-Insurance
- If driving a GOV in Canada or Mexico and your agency is not covered by a SOFA or other diplomatic treaty which specifically addresses liability issues:
 - GSA General Counsel's office determined that an agency **must** purchase additional liability insurance to operate vehicles in foreign countries *

* Unless your mission is covered by diplomatic treaty or SOFA, most civilian agencies are not covered by a treaty or SOFA

Federal Tort Claims Act

- Driving in Canada or Mexico? Continued
 - The Federal Torts Claims Act does not protect Federal employees outside the United States
 - Contact your agency's General Counsel office for assistance
 - If short duration trips, consider commercial rentals that are inclusive of insurance in foreign countries

Liability Assigned

- What about the damage to the Government Vehicle (GOV)?
 - Pretense
 - Government employee is at fault, there is damage to the GOV
 - FTCA protects them from 3rd party liability
- Can you (the driver) be held liable for the damage to the GOV?

Liability Assigned

- **YES**, the driver can be held liable for the damage to the GOV
 - FTCA covers 3rd Party Claims, it does not cover the damage to the agency owned/leased GOV
- Guidance based on Department of Justice ruling for EPA
 - “Memorandum of Opinion for the Acting General Counsel Environmental Protection Agency” May 28 2008

Liability Assigned

- Policy will vary by each agency
 - Typically a “Board of Survey” is convened to review the case
- It is an official investigation/vetting process
 - Will have to prove some type of negligence
- Investigation will decide if the at fault driver has to pay for damages to the GOV.
 - Examples are Army FLIPL, Air Force Report of Survey

Privately Owned Vehicles (POV) on Government Business

- In most cases use of personal vehicles for the benefit of the government is prohibited unless **Officially Authorized**.
- When authorized, employee is reimbursed on a mileage basis.
 - Cost of collision and liability insurance is a component of mileage reimbursement

Privately Owned Vehicles (POV) on Government Business

- If you are involved in an accident in your POV, were at fault and had proper authorization to use your POV for government business
 - You cannot be held liable for damage or injury to 3rd parties if acting within your Scope of Employment, you are covered under the Federal Tort Claims Act
 - This does not indemnify the employee from discipline or adverse action for negligence

Privately Owned Vehicles (POV) on Government Business

- Employee must seek reimbursement from their private insurance carrier for loss or damage to their Vehicle while under POV travel authorization
 - ****BEFORE** you use your POV for work related travel, contact your insurance carrier to see if and how you are covered.**
 - Research what type of coverage you may need (umbrella policy)
 - Ensure you have the proper coverage to protect your vehicle

Privately Owned Vehicles (POV) on Government Business

- Employees may file a claim under the Military Personnel and Civilian Employees' Claims Act for the deductible amount of the employee's personal Insurance policy
 - Work with your agency's General Counsel to submit and process the claim.

Privately Owned Vehicles (POV) on Government Business

- The key to using a POV for official Government business is **“AUTHORIZED”**
 - An employee cannot arbitrarily use their vehicle (without proper authorization) to perform government business and expect to be covered

Rental Cars *updated 2023

- Generally, drivers are covered under the FTCA
 - Scope of Employment, official use rules apply
- “Government Rate” rental costs provide a myriad of protections to the driver(s) - for more information visit <https://www.defensetravel.dod.mil/site/rentalCar.cfm>
 - Read Rental Agreement Number 4
- Encourage you to use the companies that offer the Government Rate

Rental Cars *updated 2023

- What about after hours or extended TDYs?
 - Can I use the rental car for personal use?
- 41 CFR 301-10.450 was updated on 4/22/2022 adding paragraph (f)
 - Paragraph (f) clarifies how a government rental vehicle must be used, “for official purposes”
 - There is no mention of personal use

Rental Cars *updated 2023

- 41 CFR 301-10.450 is amended to read:
 - (f) **A rental car is to be used only for official purposes**, which include transportation:
 - (1) Between places of official business;
 - (2) Between such places and places of temporary lodging when public transportation is unavailable or its use is impractical; or
 - (3) Between either subparagraph (1) or (2) of this paragraph and restaurants, drug stores, barber shops, places of worship, cleaning establishments, and similar places necessary for the sustenance, comfort, or health of the employee to foster the continued efficient performance of Government business

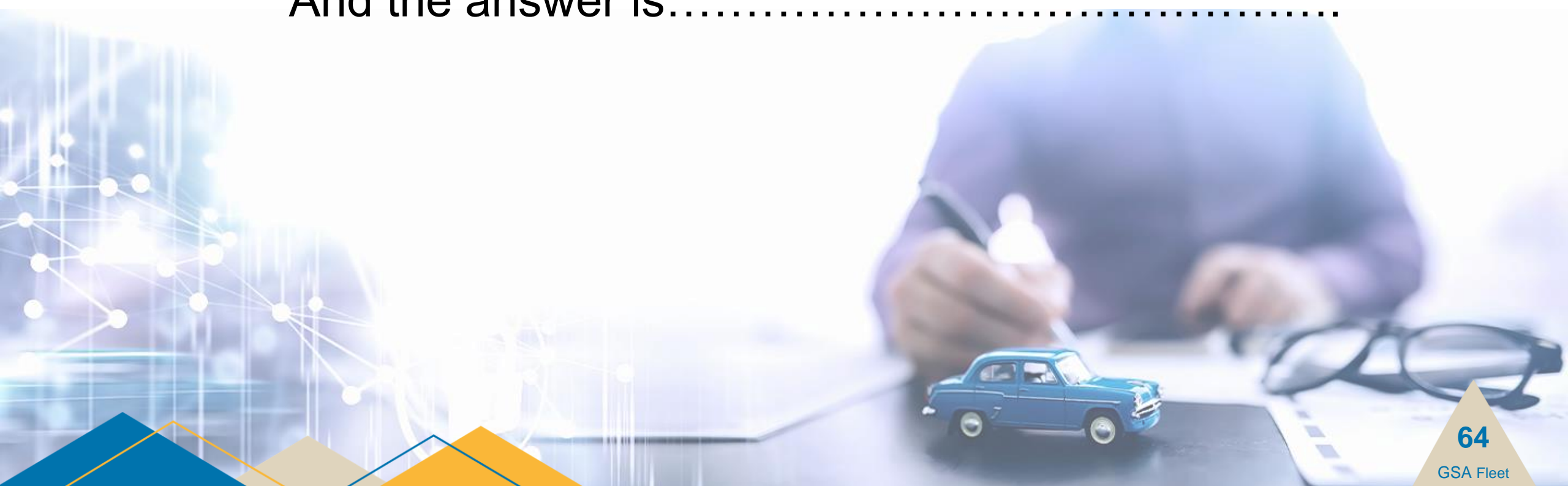
Rental Cars VS STR

- Vehicles rented via the Short Term Rental (STR) Program **DO NOT** have the same protections found in rental agreement #4.
 - Handled very similar to GSA Fleet Leased Vehicles
 - Liability is covered under the FTCA
 - Damage to the rented vehicle is submitted to the STR Program Office as a claim.
 - STR Program will issue payments for valid claims.
 - Costs are passed through to the agency via the STR Statement (“J” and “K” bills)

Ultimate Question of the Session

Are you personally liable if you are involved in a vehicle accident, while driving a GOV and are at fault?

And the answer is.....



MOST DEFINITELY MAYBE!

- It depends on the mitigating circumstances, including but not limited to
 - Official Use
 - Scope of Employment
 - The state the accident was in
 - Fault
- Contact your Agency Fleet Manager or General Counsel for more information

Summary

- Your Responsibilities When Using a GOV
- Official Use/Misuse
- Permissible/Impermissible Use
- Scope of Employment
- Liability Assigned
- Federal Tort Claims Act
- Privately Owned Vehicles on Government Business
- Rental Cars
- We Answered the Liability Question.



Thank you for attending today's Desktop Workshop

For additional information on this topic contact:

Your FSR or Devin.beckes@gsa.gov

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References

- 41 CFR 102-34 Motor Vehicle Management, Subpart D
- 41 CFR 102-34.225/31 U.S.C 1349 Adverse Personnel Actions
- Singleton v Burchfield Feb 25, 2005
- Essig v. United States of America and Edward Hamil -1987
- Air Force Instruction 24-301
- *Chufu v. Department of the Interior*, 45 F.3d 419 (Fed. Cir. 1995)

References

- Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA)
- Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) 51.202
- GAO Redbook Appropriations Law Redbook, Volume III, pages 12-217 to 12-218
- Memorandum of Opinion for the Acting General Counsel Environmental Protection Agency” May 28 2008
- Controlled Substances Act (CSA) (21 U.S.C. § 811)
- 41 CFR 102-34.215
- 41 CFR 102-34.235

References

- Federal Acquisition Regulation 28.307-2
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