

Dept. of Agriculture Credit Card Abuse Uncovered: Total Misuse ~ \$7.7 Million in Only Six Months

The USDA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) released a report citing extensive internal abuse of the Travel Card Program, which allows certain employees to use credit cards to pay for business expenses while on agency travel. According to the report, USDA employees used the credit cards for numerous personal purchases, all paid for with taxpayer dollars.

Items Purchased With USDA Credit Cards:

- Ozzy Osbourne concert tickets
- An Automobile
- Tattoos
- Cigarettes
- Cosmetics
- Exotic attire
- Enrollment in a bartending college



Additional Credit Card Abuses:

- \$4,834,765 spent on credit cards while not on travel
- \$966,498 abusive purchases on credit cards while on travel
- \$196,000 spent by 12 individuals who never traveled for official government purposes
- \$123,787 on organization memberships
- \$17,000 ATM withdrawals by one individual, who subsequently was given only a 30-day suspension
- 147 car payments totaling \$11,444

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General Headquarters Audit Report, Adequacy of Internal Controls Over the Individually Billed Travel Card Program, Report No. 50601-05-HQ, June 2003. <http://www.usda.gov/oig/webdocs/50601-05-HQ.pdf>

Agency Response:

In response to the OIG report, USDA reports it has taken several measures to address these abuses. The Agency deactivated over 10,000 credit cards held by infrequent travelers and instituted a “zero tolerance” policy for card misuse. However, when asked if the employee who charged Ozzy Osbourne tickets to his USDA credit card was fired, a USDA official could not confirm his termination.