U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Department of Homeland Security Fiscal Year 2012 Annual Report on Conferences

January 31, 2013

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is the third largest Federal agency and the largest law enforcement agency in the Federal government. The DHS workforce consists of more than 240,000 law enforcement agents, officers, active-duty military personnel, and men and women on the frontlines who put their lives at risk every day to protect our country from threats to the homeland, securing our land, air, and maritime borders, enforcing our immigration laws, and responding to natural disasters. These employees are stationed in every state and in more than 75 countries around the world. Training events and workshops are critical to bringing our geographically dispersed workforce together and ensuring that our personnel are fully equipped and prepared to carry out their missions.

In order to execute our missions, and to do so in an efficient and effective manner, DHS offers significant training and technical assistance to state, local, and tribal law enforcement and first responders to build expertise and capabilities across the country. The Homeland Security Act requires the Secretary to coordinate with state and local governments, and the private sector, to ensure adequate planning, equipment, training, and exercise activities. As demonstrated during the response to recent natural disasters including the devastating tornadoes in the South and Midwest and Hurricanes Irene and Sandy, a well-trained cadre of first responders is critical to ensuring an effective response, helping to save lives, and minimize damage. Time and time again, we have also seen the value of our state, local, and tribal law enforcement training in disrupting terrorist plots and other crimes.

In September 2011, the Office Management and Budget (OMB) released a memo instructing agencies to review their conference policies and internal controls to ensure they are appropriate and effective, and requiring Deputy Secretary–approval of all conference activity until the review is complete. In addition, in November 2011, the President signed an Executive Order, “Promoting Efficient Spending,” requiring agencies to develop plans to ensure efficient spending in several areas, including travel and conferences. In May 2012, OMB released a memo instructing agencies to publish a list of all agency sponsored conferences, where the net expenses exceed $100,000.

In accordance with this guidance, the Department requires all Agency sponsored conference-related spending above $10,000 to obtain the Deputy Secretary’s approval prior to obligating funds.

Components request approval of proposed conferences through their Component Senior Financial Officers via memo to the Deputy Secretary. The requests set forth specific cost information, including any proposed travel or meals, and demonstrates how the conference supports the DHS mission. The

Chief Financial Officer reviews each proposal against DHS policy and recommends approval or disapproval before forwarding the request to the Deputy Secretary for a final decision.

Furthermore, DHS has established additional conference and travel policies and controls to ensure conferences are cost-effective and to ensure conference attendance is driven by critical mission requirements. These include:

- Establishing additional conference-related responsibilities for the CFO and Components.
- Incorporating requirements to use government facilities, cost-effective alternatives to commercial facilities, and limiting the number of DHS attendees to conferences – consistent with the Efficiency Review travel guidance.
- Amending existing guidance by adding a section on the authority to collect conference fees from non-federal participants, including the statutory reporting requirement.
- Better defining DHS requirements to justify, document, and report conference-related expenses.
- Adding guidance for travel approvers to check for actions, such as use of non-contract carriers and deductions of per diem when meals are provided at conferences and reasonableness of expenses requested in the authorization process.

These policy changes have generated cost-avoidances within DHS Components and offices. More training events are now being held locally and Components and offices are increasing the use of video teleconferencing in lieu of in person meetings while also strengthening internal management oversight and controls. As responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars, DHS is dedicated to planning and executing DHS conferences as cost-effectively as possible. We will continue to monitor training events and workshops across the Department and will work with Components and offices to ensure that all resources are spent responsibly and in support of critical mission requirements.

During the course of the fiscal year, the Department hosted or sponsored 35 conferences where the net expense to the Department exceeded $100,000 per event; these conferences totaled approximately $7.5 million. Of those, the Department sponsored two conferences, *Innovation Expo*[1] and *Assistance to Firefighter Grants and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Panel Review*[2], where the net expense to the Department exceeded $500,000.

Attached is the Department's Annual Report on Conference Spending over $100,000. You will find a listing of all conferences where the net cost to the Department exceeded $100,000 per event. The enclosed report contains the following data points for each event—

[1] The United States Coast Guard held *Innovation Expo* prior to the issuance of OMB M 12-12. Therefore, a waiver was not required to be signed by the Secretary.

[2] The Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 requires a peer review panel before awarding the Assistance to Firefighter Grants and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grants. FEMA chose to combine the peer review process for the two grant programs into a single event achieving considerable cost savings.

- The total net conference expenses incurred by the Department for the conference.
- The location of the conference.
- The date of the conference.
- An event description.
- An explanation of how the conference advanced the mission of DHS.
- The total number of individuals whose conference expenses were paid by DHS.