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TRAVEL SYSTEM ADOPTS DIGITAL SIGNATURES

The Department of Defense today announced a major step in reforming its travel procedures: the adoption of digital electronic signature for travel. Digital signatures will allow travelers to receive electronic authorization prior to a trip and permit them to sign their vouchers after the trip. These electronic "John Hancocks" create a secure and legal association between the traveler and the voucher information.

DoD will use the Federal Standard for Digital Signature (Federal Information Processing Standard 186) internally, but will also allow for interoperability with commercial algorithms such as RSA signature. Contractors will verify the accuracy and completeness of individual travel documents before payment.

"Adopting digital signature is a key move toward a paperless travel process in the Department of Defense," said Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) John Hamre and overseer of the Department's travel reengineering efforts. "We have to do business smarter and more efficiently--and these reforms in the Defense Travel System show we can."

The Defense Travel System is a large-scale attempt by the federal government to use digital signatures on travel claims. The new signature process is scheduled to be piloted first in the eleven state region of the DTS's Travel Region Six for trip planning and travel claims. Travel Region Six covers the states of Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin. The region includes more than 200,000 travelers and their authorizing officials. Phase in of the signature process starts in April 1998. Following successful implementation of the pilots within Region Six, the new procedures will be implemented rapidly throughout the Department.

Acceptance of digital signatures in the travel process could have much wider applications in reforming buying practices in the Department of Defense. The Defense Travel Service effort is serving as a practical approach for digital signature certificates, including commercial infrastructures and services, that could eventually be used in Department-wide electronic commerce efforts.

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