



www.taxpayersalliance.com

Research Note 52

“Do you really need to take that flight?” The Environment Agency’s hypocrisy on short haul flights

Visitors to the Environment Agency’s website are encouraged to ask themselves if they “really need to take that flight”.¹ With air travel a rising source of greenhouse gases, the Environment Agency believes everyone should try not to fly if it can be avoided:

“[...] If you care about the climate don't take advantage of the current free-for-all. Ask: Is that business trip really necessary? How about taking that weekend break - or buying that second home, come to that - in the UK rather than eastern or southern Europe? Why not travel to European destinations by train? You'll see much more of the countryside.”²

Short haul flights are singled out as being particularly unwelcome, as they typically produce more green-house gasses per passenger than long haul flights.³ But does the Environment Agency live up to its own standards? Does it ask if all its business trips are really necessary? And when going to Europe, does it always go by train? A Freedom of Information Request was sent to the Environment Agency to establish exactly how much it spends on air travel for its staff and contractors, and where those flights are going to.⁴

Key Findings:

- The **total spent on all flights** by the Environment Agency in **2008-09 was £164,320**. This is a **20 percent increase** from the total amount spent in **2007-08, which was £136,596**.
- In 2008-09 Environment Agency staff took at least **51 flights to Edinburgh**, at a cost of **£6,932**.
- In 2008-09 Environment Agency staff took at least **37 flights to Dublin**, at a cost of **£3,569**.
- In 2008-09 Environment Agency staff took at least **26 flights to Brussels**, at a cost of **£6,981**.

¹ <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/climatechange/31796.aspx>

² Ibid

³ 'Short haul' flights are defined as those taking 3 hours or less. All longer flights are classed 'long haul'.

⁴ Freedom of Information request sent to the Environment Agency is attached as an Appendix.

- In 2008-09 Environment Agency staff took at least **17** flights to **Belfast**, at a cost of **£2,177**.
- In 2008-09 Environment Agency staff took at least **16** flights to **Newcastle**, at a cost of **£1,831**.
- In 2008-09 the Environment Agency staff took at least **15** flights to **Paris**, at a cost of **£2,254**.
- In 2008-09 Environment Agency staff took at least **12** flights to **Bristol**, at a cost of **£1,292**. This includes at least two flights from Plymouth to Bristol.

Table 1: Total flight spending by Environment Agency regional office

Regional office	Total spent, £
Anglian	718
Midlands	342
North East	11,315
North West	22,038
Southern	2,008
Thames	2,022
South West	7,006
EA Wales	4,751
Head Office	109,404
CIS	708
NLS	4,006
Total	164,319

Jennifer Dunn, Policy Analyst at the TaxPayers' Alliance, said:

"The Environment Agency lectures ordinary people that they shouldn't use short haul flights, but when it comes to their own travel, they take dozens of domestic flights each year. Too often one rule exists for ordinary people and another for civil servants, who aren't going to let their rhetoric get in the way of taking the short haul flights that are often the most convenient and affordable way of getting around. Politicians and officials should be mindful that if it's ok for them, it's ok for everyone."



To arrange broadcast interviews or discuss the research, please contact:

Jennifer Dunn
Policy Analyst, TaxPayers' Alliance
jennifer.dunn@taxpayersalliance.com
07993 674 711

Matthew Sinclair
Research Director, TaxPayers' Alliance
matthew.sinclair@taxpayersalliance.com
07771 990 174



Appendix 1: Freedom of Information Request

Environment Agency
PO Box 544
Rotherham
S60 1BY
@environment-agency.gov.

8 September 2009

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION ON TRAVEL COSTS

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to request information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. In order to assist you with this request, I am outlining my query as specifically as possible.

I would like to be sent the following information for each of the financial years 2004/05 – 2008/09:

- **Total annual cost of domestic air travel for Environment Agency staff and contractors (broken down by individual journey)**
- **Total cost of international air travel for Environment Agency staff and contractors (broken down by individual journey)**
- **Total number of flights taken by Environment Agency staff and contractors (domestic + international)**

If you need further clarification, please contact me by email. If the exact cost is not available, an estimate (to the nearest £100) would be acceptable.

My preferred format to receive the information is electronically, but I can accept hard copies.

I would be grateful if you could confirm by email that you have received this request. I look forward to your response within 20 working days.

Regards,

XXXXXXXXXX