



U.S. General Services Administration

Darren Blue

Assistant Commissioner

Office of Facilities Management &
Services Programs

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Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation
Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard

“The Role of Certification in Rewarding Sustainable Fishing”

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Introduction

Good morning Chairman Begich, Ranking Member Rubio, and members of the Subcommittee. I am Darren Blue, Assistant Commissioner for Facilities Management and Services Programs in GSA's Public Buildings Service. I appreciate being invited here today to discuss GSA's role in developing guidelines for healthy and sustainable food services in federal facilities.

Today I will speak to the GSA's support of health and sustainability policies and practices within our inventory of Federal office space.

First and foremost, I'd like to establish GSA's view that U.S.-managed fisheries do not require third-party certification to demonstrate responsible practices. GSA is working with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and other agencies to revise our Health and Sustainability Guidelines for Federal Concessions and Vending Operations to ensure they provide absolute clarity on this matter.

Development of GSA-HHS Health and Sustainability Guidelines for Federal Concessions and Vending Operations

In 2009, President Obama issued Executive Order 13514, "Federal Leadership in Environmental, Energy, and Economic Performance," directing Federal agencies to leverage acquisitions to encourage markets for sustainable products and services. As the Federal government's landlord, GSA is well positioned to drive change by supporting sustainability in federal facilities and encouraging health and wellness among federal employees.

From 2009 to 2011, GSA and HHS jointly developed the Health and Sustainability Guidelines with a working group that included health and sustainability experts from several Federal agencies. GSA and HHS co-released the Guidelines in March 2011. NOAA did not participate in the development of the original Guidelines, but GSA and HHS have since been working with NOAA to develop revisions.

We designed the Guidelines to make healthy choices more accessible and appealing. As written, they serve as a practical guide and resource for vendors crafting proposals to provide concessions or vending services in federal facilities. Our intent was to broaden choices, not restrict choices.

GSA worked extensively with private industry in developing the Guidelines. In October 2009, prior to beginning our partnership with HHS, GSA released a Request for Information to gain valuable feedback and insight from concessions and environmental stakeholders on wellness and sustainability practices in food service delivery and concessions contracting. Some of the responses suggested the idea of third-party sustainable fishing certification programs as a guide for responsible seafood procurement.

GSA confirmed the recommendations generated through the RFI process, and during a subsequent industry roundtable with industry experts and our other federal agency partners, we developed Guidelines that cited a pair of third-party entities for sustainability certification. Specifically, the guidelines encouraged vendors to refer to the Monterey Bay Aquarium and the Marine Stewardship Council or other equivalent systems when developing proposals.

GSA and HHS intended the third-party groups cited in the Guidelines to be helpful examples for vendors, not eliminating factors. We now understand that these references have caused some confusion. GSA and HHS are now working with NOAA to develop revisions consistent with our intent to issue helpful, inclusive Guidelines that reflect federal fisheries management policy and practices. We expect to release the revised Guidelines in the coming weeks, and GSA anticipates that they will not include references to third-party certification systems.

Conclusion

Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today. Given GSA's role in supporting sustainable workplaces and the health and wellness of federal employees across the country, we look forward to continuing this dialogue and updating the Subcommittee on the issuance of updated Guidelines. I am pleased to take your questions.