



Foreign Travel Policy
April 29, 2010

The Audit, Review, and Compliance (ARC) Branch provides services for the Quality Systems Verification Programs (QSVP). The QSVP are voluntary, user-fee, audit-based programs that are available to suppliers of agricultural products and services. The QSVP are designed to provide suppliers the opportunity to assure customers of their ability to provide consistent quality products or services. The supplier's documented quality management system is verified through independent third-party audits conducted by the ARC Branch. The supplier may be a domestic or foreign company. Additionally, the supplier's program may include domestic and/or foreign operations. The ARC Branch must consider its ability to conduct audits and witness audits in foreign countries and regions when approving a supplier's program.

The ARC Branch determines its ability to conduct international travel based on the travel warnings and/or travel alerts issued by U.S. Department of State. Travel warnings and alerts are updated based on long-term and short-term conditions within a country. This information is available via the U.S. Department of State Web site at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html.

In some instances, the ARC Branch may determine that it cannot conduct audits or witness audits within a country or region due to the current political climate and/or a direct threat to U.S. citizens, despite the lack of travel warnings or alerts. When necessary, and where feasible, U.S. Embassy and/or USDA Foreign Agricultural Service officials may accompany the ARC Branch. Travel expenses for these officials are the responsibility of the client.

The ARC Branch will not conduct audits or witness audits within countries where (1) the U.S. Department of State urges U.S. citizens to avoid all travel to the country and (2) the U.S. government does not have diplomatic or consular relations, including Cuba, Iran, and North Korea, but excluding Taiwan. The ARC Branch cannot conduct audits or witness audits within countries or regions where the U.S. Embassy does not approve official travel.

In the event that the ARC Branch is unable to travel to a foreign country or region, the ARC Branch may deny approval of the client's entire program. Alternatively, the ARC Branch may deny only the activities located within the specific country or region from the scope of the client's approved program. Where feasible, the ARC Branch may use alternative methods to verify a client's activities within a specific country or region in which it is unable to travel. These methods may include accepting another accreditation body's report, verification of activities via a review of records and interviews, and/or the use of technology such as video and GPS to conduct witness audits.

Steve E. Ross, Acting Branch Chief