

Use Discretion With Holiday Gifts from Contractors, Lobbyists

BY AMY HOWELL

(Dec. 6, 2002) 'Tis the season to – among other festivities – receive gifts from family, friends, co-workers and associates. However, MTA's Ethics Department is offering a friendly reminder to employees to use discretion if accepting a gift from a lobbyist or contractor.



Warren Morse, DEO of Marketing, signs over a gift basket to Chief Ethics Officer Karen Gorman, as required by MTA's Code of Conduct.

Section 15 of MTA's Code of Conduct states that employees are allowed to accept gifts from contractors as long as the amount does not exceed \$10 in a single month or up to \$50 in a calendar year.

Similarly, employees may accept gifts from lobbyists as long as the amount does not exceed \$10 in a single month or up to \$120 in a calendar year. Employees are not allowed to accept gifts of any amount from bidders or proposers.

"The public has to have confidence in their public servants that they are not making decisions that are biased based upon receipt of gifts from people they deal with," says Chief Ethics Officer Karen Gorman. "Employees have to act in the best interest of the agency."

Gorman cites cheese and fruit baskets, gourmet coffee and wine, mugs, clocks, crystal vases, folding chairs, leather jackets and other apparel, sporting event tickets and lava lamps as gifts employees have received in the past.

Turn in the gift

If an employee receives a gift from a contractor or lobbyist, he or she may return it to the giver, donate it to a charity without taking the tax deduction or turn it over to the Ethics Department.

If the employee chooses the latter, the gift will be donated to a local charity and the Ethics Department will notify the employee of what happened to it.

Employees may accept from contractors or lobbyists certain things that by law are not "gifts," such as informational materials, company-related calendars and books. Allowable gifts are outlined in Section 16 of MTA's Code of Conduct for Employees.

For more information on the agency's policy on gifts, allowable gifts and gifts from contractors and lobbyists, employees may refer to their "Code of Conduct for MTA Employees" booklet or to the Ethics Department's Intranet web page under the heading, "Codes" and "Employees."

'We're here to get the word out so people do the right thing,' says Gorman.

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