

Holiday Gifts from MTA Vendors are Off-Limits

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Dec. 17, 2003) So, what do you want for a holiday gift? That's not a question MTA employees want to hear from those who do business with the agency.

Most employees may be aware that accepting gifts from vendors and contractors is verboten – if the gift is valued at more than \$10. Even so, it's surprising what some employees have turned over to MTA's Ethics and Lobby Registration Department.

Lakers leather jackets. A crystal vase. A pair of Dr. Seuss lava lamps. Obviously over the top and beyond the \$10 limit.

But an ordinary box of candy or a basket of fruit? Why can't the recipient just share that with other employees and, in effect, parcel out the cost among the group?

Sharing doesn't count

"Even if the employee chooses to share a gift," says Chief Ethics Officer Karen Gorman, "the full amount of the gift is still attributable to the individual who accepts it."

MTA's Code of Conduct permits employees to accept gifts from a single contractor of no more than \$10 value in a given month and no more than \$50 total for a calendar year. Employees are forbidden to accept gifts of any value whatsoever from an individual or company bidding on an MTA contract.

Some departments, such as Procurement, have general policies forbidding employees from accepting any gifts from outside sources.

Under MTA's Code of Conduct, employees who receive gifts that exceed the dollar value limit must either return the gift or give the gift to the Ethics Department to donate to a charity within 30 days.

Some items exempt

Some items are exempt from the definition of "gifts" under the law. The Ethics Office helps employees determine the value of gifts and whether any exemption applies.

Employees who receive gifts should contact the Ethics Office at 922-2900. There's more information on the department's Intranet web site at <http://intranet1/dept/ethics/default.htm>. Copies of the Code of Conduct are available from the Ethics Office and may be accessed as a pdf file at <http://intranet1/dept/ethics/codes/Policies/codeofconduct.pdf>.

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