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Gifts to Employees Have Declined, but Some Vendors Don't Get the Hint

Metro's ethics rules strictly limit what employees can accept

(Dec. 20, 2005) For the past two years, a certain contractor has sent Metro Procurement Chief Lonnie Mitchell a small Christmas gift.

Both times, Mitchell turned the item over to the Ethics Office and wrote the contractor a "polite letter" reminding him of Metro's gifts policy. He's hoping the contractor will get the idea that gifts are unwelcome before the next holiday season rolls around.

Despite Mitchell's experience, the size and number of holiday gifts that vendors and contractors give Metro employees has diminished considerably in the past few year, says Chief Ethics Officer Karen Gorman. She attributes that to an increased awareness of the agency's ethical standards.

Under Metro's Code of Conduct, gifts to employees by an individual or company doing business with the agency are limited to \$10 in a month and up to \$50 in a calendar year.

A 'zero' gifts policy

Some departments, like Mitchell's Procurement Department, have set a "zero" gifts policy, given the sensitive nature of their work and their frequent contact with vendors and contractors.

Gorman encourages any employee who receives a gift from an outside company to avoid the appearance of conflict of interest by turning it over to the Ethics Office.

The employee will receive a receipt for the gift, which will be



Chief Ethics Officer Karen Gorman and Procurement Chief Lonnie Mitchell display some of the holiday gifts received by Metro employees this year. All will be donated to charities.

donated to one of a number of charities listed by the agency.

The charities, which usually auction the gifts to raise money, provide receipts to the Ethics office, which keeps records of all such transactions. The employee will be notified which charity received the gift.

“It’s very easy to want to be a nice person and not to see any harm in a gift and just accept it,” says Mitchell, but in the long run, “It’s easier to say thanks, but no thanks.”