

[Metro.net](#) (web)

Resources

► [Safety](#)

► [Pressroom](#) (web)

► [Ask the CEO](#)

► [CEO Forum](#)

► [Employee Recognition](#)

► [Employee Activities](#)

► [Metro Projects](#)

► [Facts at a Glance](#) (web)

► [Archives](#)

► [Events Calendar](#)

► [Research Center/Library](#)

► [Metro Classifieds](#)

► [Bazaar](#)

Metro Info

► [30/10 Initiative](#)

► [Policies](#)

► [Training](#)

► [Help Desk](#)

► [Intranet Policy](#)

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Chief Ethics Officer Karen Gorman admires a poinsettia plant sent to General Services by a well-intentioned contractor. The wreath, dutifully turned over to Ethics Department by DEO Phyllis Meng, is destined to make the holidays a little brighter for someone in need: Gifts ranging in value from \$10 to about \$150 or more are bundled up and distributed to various charities.

Reroute Your Holiday Gifts to Ethics

- **Ethics Department Rebundles Gifts from Outside Vendors and Contractors for Charity Organizations**

(Dec. 15, 2009) Chief Ethics Officer Karen Gorman reminds 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.

"It's very easy to want to be gracious and not see any harm in a gift and just accept it," says Gorman, but in the long run, "It's easier to say thanks, but no thanks."

Under Metro policy a gift from a Metro bidder or contractor must be returned or donated to a charity. In such instances, the Ethics Department can collect the gifts from employees and donate the items to charity, and provide the employees with records of the transaction. Gifts from even non-Metro related persons over \$50 may have to be reported on an annual economic disclosure form (Form

700) for designated employees.

"We do this as a service to our employees to make it easier for them to comply with the law, to do something nice for a person in need, and help maintain Metro's credibility with the public," said Gorman.

The [Employee Code of Conduct](#), which can be accessed on the Ethics & Lobbyist web pages from the "Select a Department" drop-down menu on the myMetro.net homepage, includes a description of the gift rules in Section 5-15-130.

The purpose of the rule on gifts, according to the Code, is "to assure the public that public employees are not influenced to show favoritism to a contractor based on receiving gifts or for being rewarded for doing his or her job in a way that will benefit the giver of the gift."