

HOLIDAY GUIDANCE For DOI Employees

Including guidance on receptions, parties, and gift exchanges involving co-workers, contractors and supervisors, as well as decorations and use of alcohol

The holiday season is traditionally a time of parties, receptions and exchanging of gifts. However, even during the holiday season, the Standards of Conduct apply. To ensure that you don't unwittingly violate the standards, the Departmental Ethics Office has compiled a brief summary of the applicable rules. If you have any questions, please contact your ethics advisor.

GENERAL RULE

Federal employees may not, directly or indirectly, solicit or accept gifts offered because of their official positions or offered by a prohibited source. A prohibited source is anyone who:

- Seeks official action by the employee's agency;
- Does business or seeks to do business with the employee's agency;
- Conducts activities regulated by the employee's agency;
- Has interests that may be substantially affected by the employee's performance of duties; or
- Is an organization composed of members described above.
- *Political appointees are subject to additional prohibitions. Political appointees may not accept gifts from registered lobbyists.*

Parties, Open Houses and Receptions Hosted by Non-Prohibited Sources:

- Federal employees may attend social events sponsored by a *non-prohibited* source if no one is charged admission.

Parties, Open Houses and Receptions Hosted by Prohibited Sources, Including Contractors:

- The general rule is that Federal employees may **not** accept gifts from prohibited sources, including contractors and contractor personnel, unless allowed by one of the following exceptions:
 1. The gift amount does not exceed \$20, and the total amount of gifts an employee accepts from that source does not exceed \$50 for the year;
 2. The gift is given because of a **bona fide personal relationship**;
 3. The open house or reception, and any gift of refreshments, may be accepted if it is a **widely attended gathering**, and the employee's supervisor determines that it is in the agency's interests that the employee

attends. (The employee must complete and submit to his or her ethics official a DI-1958 documenting their attendance at the widely attended gathering);

4. The invitation to the open house or reception is open to the public;
5. The invitation to the open house or reception is offered to a group or class that is not related to Government employment;
6. The invitation to an event is the result of outside business or other relationship. For example, a Federal employee's spouse works at Monsanto. The Federal employee may accompany the spouse to the Monsanto employee's holiday party since the invitation is to the spouse as an employee, and not to the Federal employee because of his or her position.

Parties, Open Houses and Receptions Hosted by Other Federal Employees or Organizations:

- *Invitation to an event from your subordinate:* You may accept personal hospitality at the residence of a subordinate that is customarily provided on the occasion.
- *Invitations from your boss or a co-worker:* No restrictions. Enjoy!

Gifts and Gift Exchanges Between Federal Employees:

Supervisors may **not** accept gifts from subordinates or Federal employees who receive less pay, unless one of the following exceptions applies:

1. The gift is given because of the holiday, which occurs on an occasional basis, of **\$10 or less** (other than cash);
2. The gift is in the form of food and refreshments shared in the office;
3. If a subordinate is invited to a social event at the supervisor's residence, the subordinate may give the supervisor a hospitality gift of the type and value customarily given on such an occasion.

Gifts and Gift Exchanges That Include Contractor Personnel:

- *Gifts FROM contractors*, even during the holidays, may not exceed \$20.
- *Gifts TO contractors* may be regulated by the contractor's codes of ethics that are similar to Federal ethics regulations and may preclude the acceptance of gifts. Check with the contractor before giving a gift.
- Contract personnel may attend government social functions provided that the contract personnel do not bill the government for the hours spent at the social gathering.
- Federal employees should remember that contractors are considered a prohibited source for the purposes of ethics rules and therefore all applicable regulations concerning the employees' interaction with a prohibited source, mentioned above, should be followed.

HOLIDAY DECORATIONS

The Comptroller General has ruled that agencies may expend appropriated funds for reasonable seasonal decorations. Expenditures for seasonal decorations within the Department of the Interior should be limited to those for use in the main entrances to the Departmental buildings, or shared work areas. Expenditures are not authorized for decorating private areas where the benefit is primarily for the employees who work in that area. Decorations should not endorse, or appear to endorse, any particular religious or political belief.

While appropriated funds may not be used to purchase decorations of a religious nature, employees may decorate their office areas if they purchase these decorations with their own funds. Such decorations may reflect the individual's cultural or religious beliefs (for example, a Christmas tree, a depiction of St. Nicholas, a menorah, or a Mkeka and Kinara) provided that such decorations don't interfere with the accomplishment of the Department's official responsibilities.

ALCOHOL

The Secretary has the authority to permit the use of alcohol in the Main and South Interior Buildings. The Secretary has delegated this authority to the NBC's Division of General Services. Please contact David L. Mathews at 202-273-3218, Mariane Gately at 202-208-7204 or the Administrative Operations Service Desk at 202-208-2222 to request a waiver of the alcohol beverage prohibition.

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- You may not solicit outside sources for contributions to your office party.
- Generally, office parties are unofficial events, and you may not use appropriated funds to pay for them.
- Beware that door prizes or drawings could involve gambling which would require compliance with state statutes and Federal regulations. GSA regulations ban gambling in GSA owned or controlled buildings.
- You may not use appropriated funds to purchase and send greeting cards.