

HOLIDAY PARTIES AND GIFTS

GIFTS AND INVITATIONS

Are there any limits on employees accepting holiday gifts?

- Yes; an employee may not accept a gift given because of the employee's Government position, or from someone with interests before the Department, unless based on a personal relationship or it is less than \$20 in value (and the total of all gifts from the same donor that year was \$50 or less).

May Federal employees accept invitations to holiday parties?

- Yes, but party invitations are considered gifts and may only be accepted from someone with interests before the Department if (1) based on a personal relationship; (2) \$20 or less in value; (3) or it is approved by a supervisor because the employee's attendance will serve an agency purpose that outweighs appearance problems and it is to a "widely-attended event"—one with a large number and broad range of persons attending at which it will be possible to discuss matters of mutual interest. Approval is not appropriate for events that are primarily entertainment in nature.

GIFTS BETWEEN EMPLOYEES

Are there any limits on collecting money for an office holiday party?

- Office parties are permitted, but participation must be voluntary. No one may be coerced into participating, but those attending may be required to contribute a set amount to offset costs.

May co-workers exchange gifts?

- Yes, provided that all persons are participating voluntarily. Supervisors may participate in mutual gift exchanges (such as a "secret Santa" exchange), but it would be advisable to limit the value of gifts to no more than \$10 if supervisors and subordinates will be exchanging gifts.

May Federal employees give holiday gifts to supervisors or collect funds for such gifts from co-workers?

- Yes, but the amount is limited. Employees may give gifts to a supervisor on an occasional basis, including on a holiday, provided that the value of the gift (not just the contribution) is \$10 or less and there was no coercion.

Prepared by the Ethics Division, Office of the Assistant General Counsel for Administration, U.S.

Department of Commerce – January 2, 2003

FOR ADVICE ON THIS TOPIC, CALL THE ETHICS DIVISION AT (202) 482-5384



A WORD ABOUT ETHICS



