



Ethics Matters

An eNewsletter of the City of Atlanta Board of Ethics

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Links

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Workshop Dates

Employees
 8/22/2008
 10/24/2008

Board members
 NPU officers
 10/4/2008

Matters Preview

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Vendor Agrees to Repay Illegal Gratuity

A city vendor has agreed to pay the City of Atlanta nearly \$8,400 for giving an all-expense paid trip to Las Vegas and other gifts of meals, golf, and football tickets to city employees last fall.

Levi, Ray & Shoup, an information technology company headquartered in Illinois, admitted that its employees violated the Code of Ethics by giving improper gifts to employees in the Department of Information Technology (DIT). Apologizing to the City, the company agreed to disgorge itself of the full value of the gratuities, which included travel on a corporate jet, a car rental, two nights of lodging, meals, a round of golf, and car race tickets.

The company voluntarily reported the ethics violation to the City in November, fired two employees and demoted a third, adopted new policies and procedures for providing hospitality to government employees, and withdrew from seeking additional contracts with the City. The City had purchased servers and related services from the company last September and October. Under the settlement agreement approved by the Atlanta Board of Ethics this month, the company may resume its efforts to seek city business.

The Ethics Office is continuing to investigate allegations that two employees and one independent contractor violated the Code of Ethics by accepting the gifts of travel, lodging, meals, and entertainment from the company. DIT dismissed the employees in December and terminated the contractor in March.

In other settlement agreements, City Councilmember C.T. Martin agreed in May to pay \$250 for seeking waivers of rental fees for use of the City Hall atrium for weddings, and a Department of Watershed Management employee agreed to undergo ethics training after he received a free lunch as the guest of a city contractor's employee. The acceptance of a private meal from a prohibited source is a violation of the ban on gratuities, even when a third party pays for the meal.

For more information about ethics cases, go to the Board of Ethics' [Closed Cases](#) webpage.

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Employee Fined \$500 for Late Filing

The Board of Ethics fined Department of Watershed Management employee Paul Latham \$500 for violating the city's financial disclosure laws and voted to subpoena him to appear at the next meeting to personally receive a public reprimand. The Board imposed the maximum fine allowed by law due to Mr. Latham's status as an active city employee and his record of non-responsiveness. In addition to these actions, the Board recommended that the department take disciplinary action against Mr. Latham and ordered that his case be forwarded immediately to the City Solicitor for prosecution in Municipal Court.

The Board also imposed \$500 fines on former employees Allen Moore and Millie Walker for their failure to file any disclosure statement this year and denied retired employee Alexander Keeney's appeal to waive his \$150 fine for filing late. Rescinding its penalties in one case, the Board concluded that former employee Mark Mensah had reasonable cause for filing late since he moved out of the country last year. The remaining seven cases were resolved prior to the board meeting.

To find out more about the financial disclosure cases, visit the [Enforcement Decisions](#) webpage.

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Employees May Not Endorse Candidates While in Uniform

Continuing its efforts to establish guidelines on elections, the Board concluded that city employees may not endorse candidates or participate in political advertisements while on duty, in a government office, wearing an official uniform, or using a city vehicle.

City employees are prohibited from posting campaign signs, bumper stickers, or fundraiser invitations in City Hall, on city vehicles, or on the city's website, and from wearing partisan political buttons, caps, or slogans while on duty. These activities are prohibited because they use city property for the private advantage of individual candidates.

City employees retain their right to participate in political activities in several ways. They may work or volunteer in political campaigns, attend political meetings, and endorse candidates in their individual capacity or as a member of a union, as long as all of these activities are performed outside of working hours. If they use their official title or position in an endorsement, they must make it clear that they are expressing their own views and not the views of the City.

To read the full text of the opinion, go to the [Advisory Opinions](#) webpage and click the link to [FAO 2008-5](#).

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Gift Strings Need Cutting

Some Gifts May Have Strings Attached is the latest message in the Integrity Matters program. The City has a 24/7 ethics and compliance hotline, the Integrity Line, for city employees and citizens to report unethical, fraudulent, or illegal conduct by city officials or workers. The Integrity Line's toll-free number is 1.800.884.0911. In 2007, the City received 249 calls on the hotline, investigated 101 cases, and took corrective action in 24 cases. Of these 24 cases, departments disciplined employees in 13 cases and changed departmental policies and practices in 11 cases. The allegations were not sustained in 77 cases. The following list outlines the most common subjects of calls and their



frequency:

- employee relations (27%)
- policy issues (15%)
- theft of time (13%)
- customer relations (12%)
- wage and hour issues (6%)
- conflicts of interest (4%)
- fraud (4%)
- substance abuse (4%)

To obtain an Integrity Matters poster for your office, visit the Ethics Office on the third floor of the City Hall Tower.



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Ethics Workshops Now Available for City Employees

The Ethics Office is offering a citywide ethics workshop, *There's No Such Thing as a Free Lunch*, for the first time this fall to city employees in any department. The workshop will be given on Friday, August 22, and again on Friday, October 24. Unlike the ethics training for new employees, which focuses solely on conflicts of interest, these workshops will also cover the city's gift rules, prohibited sources, and use of city property, using examples from actual complaints and inquiries received by the Ethics Office.

The next ethics workshop for city board members, hearing officers, and NPU officers is scheduled for Saturday, October 4. All three workshops will be held in the Historic City Council Chambers from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. Light refreshments will be provided. Advance registration is required.

To register or schedule a workshop for your office, board, or NPU, call the Ethics Office or write ethicsofficer@atlantaga.gov.

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Ask the Ethics Officer: May I Wear a Campaign T-shirt to Work?

Can we wear t-shirts at work that have a photo of a presidential candidate on them?

No. While on duty, city employees cannot wear t-shirts or campaign buttons that promote any candidate for president or any other office. Employees need to limit their endorsements of political candidates for elective office – whether by buttons, t-shirts, or signs – to their off-duty hours. Employees may, of course, express a personal opinion on political issues in private conversations with co-workers.

Visit the [Ask the Ethics Officer](#) webpage to review previously asked questions.

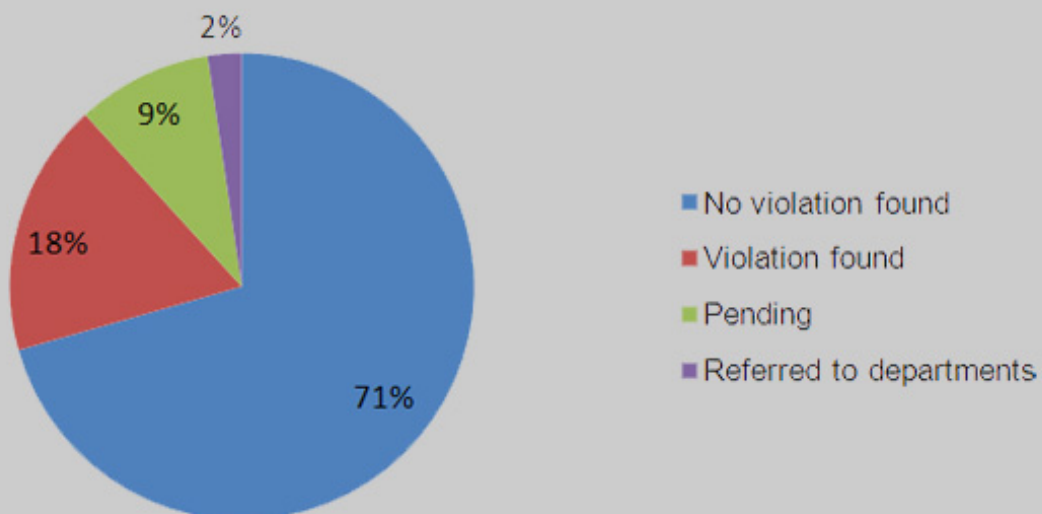
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A Matter of Fact -- 15 Ethics Violations Found Since 2003

The Ethics Office provides ethics training, gives advice, audits financial disclosure statements, investigates complaints, and enforces the Code of Ethics. In the enforcement area, the Ethics Office has received 85 ethics complaints and 124 non-ethics complaints in its first five years of operation. Of the 85 ethics complaints:

- 8 were ethics violations dealt with by the Board or Ethics Office
- 7 were ethics violations dealt with by departments
- 50 were dismissed by the Ethics Office
- 10 were dismissed by the Board for lack of probable cause
- 2 were referred to other departments
- 8 complaints are pending

Disposition of Ethics Complaints 2003 - 2007



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Ethics Matters is produced by the City of Atlanta Ethics Office.
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