

feedback

Have a question about some aspect of working at NIH? You can post anonymous queries at www.nih.gov/nihrecord/index.htm (click on the Feedback icon) and we'll try to provide answers.

Feedback: Ethics question: a number of hotels, restaurants and retail establishments offer discounts to federal employees—even if employees are on their own personal time. Usually the businesses just want you to show them your government ID to qualify for the benefit. Given the new conflict of interest regs, are NIH employees permitted to use these discounts?

Response from Marilyn Rogalski, NIH Ethics Counsel: An NIH employee would be permitted to accept a discount from a hotel, restaurant or other retail establishment if it is offered to all federal employees, even if the employee is on personal time. The employee could not accept such a discount if it was offered only to NIH employees or federal employees of a certain rank or rate of pay. The rules on such gifts are found in the government-wide standards of conduct and the recent NIH-specific changes do not affect them. These government-wide rules provide that opportunities and benefits, including favorable rates and commercial discounts, available to the public or to a class consisting of all government employees fall outside the definition of a gift and may be accepted. 5 CFR 2635.203(b)(4). More restricted opportunities and benefits are addressed in greater detail at 5 CFR 2635.204(c). NIH employees can find out more about the ethics rules and gifts at <http://ethicsc.od.nih.gov/topics/gifts.htm>.

Feedback: With the upcoming decreases in employee parking in the P2 and P3 levels of the Bldg. 10 parking garage (i.e., no more stacked parking), is there going to be any effort to decrease the number of parking spots blocked by the construction workers? Currently there are more than 20 parking places on the P2 level that are blocked off by barricades, yet no work is taking place there and no construction equipment is being stored there. It is unclear why these parking spaces are unavailable for use. Is anyone monitoring this use of space?

Response from the Division of Travel and Transportation Services, ORS: Yes. All efforts will be made to identify violators and issue citations/tow if necessary. We first will try to iden-

tify the project and project officer to have them comply. If unsuccessful then those vehicles in violation can be cited. Towing is always a last resort but in some cases a necessary evil. There are limited spaces for construction contractors in lot 41. Others may park in the visitor lot and pay associated costs. There should not be any construction vehicles parked in the employee sections.

Employees are asked to identify where these violations are taking place so ORS can follow up.

Feedback: I work in a lab in Bldg. 10 and my co-workers and I are interested in getting a water dispenser with bottled water in our area (like we see in many other lab areas). We are worried that the water in the lab is not drinkable. Whom do we contact to get a water dispenser, and does our tap water need to be tested in order for the bottled water to be provided?

Response: The Community Health Branch of the Division of Occupational Health and Safety, ORS, can test the water to determine if it is safe to drink.

NIH'ers cannot buy bottled water with government funds. Employees would need to start a water fund on their own. Some employees obtain a water dispenser from a private vendor and have the bottled water delivered. They pay for it with a pool of money collected from those who choose to participate.

Even if the water was determined to have problems, the ORS/ORF typically fixes the water problem, but this has no bearing on whether employees can or cannot get bottled water for their lab or office.



NIH Earth Day Contest Inspires Student Interest, Research

Representatives from NIH recently presented a plaque and congratulations to Tay Davis, first student winner of the "Name IT Contest" at a ceremony held at Walter Johnson High School. On hand were (from l) Dr. Julia Arnold of NCCAM; Kenny Floyd, director of the Division of Environmental Protection (DEP), ORF; Capt. Ed Rau, contest organizer, from DEP; and Davis, who is planning a career in medicine. The Moringa tree in the background, already 4 feet tall, was the tiny seedling that appeared in the Mar. 7, 2008, edition of the NIH Record. The tree was donated to the school for its greenhouse collection. The book Floyd is holding about Moringa titled Miracle Tree was written by Monica Marcu, previously an investigator with NCI. Her book is probably the most comprehensive book on the benefits of Moringa in medicine, cosmetics and nutrition and its history of use for more than 5,000 years, said Rau.

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