

March 19, 2003

Re: 10-03-20

You inquired whether members of the fire marshal's office may accept free registration to a seminar being held by the American Fire Sprinkler Association, Chesapeake Bay Chapter. The entity has offered to pay the registration fee of "Authorities Having Jurisdiction". The registration fee is \$20. Breakfast and lunch will be provided free.

The employees in the fire marshal's office inspect fire sprinkler installations. For that reason, the donor of the registration fee, a trade association comprised of fire installation companies, is a controlled donor as to your employees. Under the ethics law, employees may accept gifts of nominal value, including occasional meals or beverages, from controlled donors, assuming that there is no evidence that the gift is being offered to impair the impartial or independent judgment of the gift's recipients. The registration fee in this case is of nominal value (under \$25) and appears to cover primarily the cost of the food being served. You have stated that the conference will be of educational value to your employees and that your agency is not in the market to purchase fire sprinkler products.

The ethics commission advises that this gift may be accepted under §3-106(c) as a meal or other gift of nominal value.

Thank you for your inquiry.

Sincerely,

Betsy K. Dawson  
Executive Director