

Ethics Tip of the Month



Remember to read the fine print...

BEFORE you start trying to determine if personal use of a state resource meets the de minimis use rule, you need to read the first paragraph of the Use of Resources rule, WAC 292-110-010(1), which states in pertinent part:

The proper stewardship of state resources, including funds, facilities, tools, property, and employees and their time, is a responsibility that all state officers and employees share. Accordingly, state employees may not use state resources for personal benefit or gain or for the benefit or gain of other individuals or outside organizations.

Based on this paragraph, if your personal use of a state resource is for personal benefit or gain, or to benefit another person or outside entity, you are prohibited from using the state resource. In other words, the de minimis use rule ***does not apply***.

What does this mean in practical terms?

- Let's say you are trying to buy or sell something on Craigslist or eBay. You use your state computer to monitor the sales or auction action. Buying or selling something would benefit you and/or the person you are buying/selling the item to. Because there is personal gain involved, you are prohibited under paragraph 1 from using a state resource for this transaction – even a little bit.
- Okay, now you want to go online to your bank and check your account balances. You see that your checking account is running low and want to transfer funds from your savings account to your checking account. While you are moving funds between accounts, you are not making any more money from the transaction, so there is no personal gain. Therefore, the de minimis use rule would apply and allow you to do this occasionally. ***(Your agency policies may prohibit this use, so refer to them before using any state resources.)***
- You also own an investment account at Charles Swab. You go online at your state computer and review your investment account. You see that some of your stock is trading at a higher price than when you bought it, so you decide to sell some shares at a profit. Since you will be benefitting from this transaction (making more money), you would be prohibited under paragraph 1 from using state resources for this transaction.