



King County

KING COUNTY BOARD OF ETHICS

REPORT ON THE

2009 ETHICS QUIZ AND SURVEY

**HELPING EMPLOYEES MAKE ETHICAL DECISIONS
TO ENSURE THE PUBLIC'S TRUST IN GOVERNMENT**

2009 ETHICS QUIZ AND SURVEY REPORT

2009 ETHICS QUIZ AND SURVEY – DESCRIPTION

The Board of Ethics conducted the sixth annual on-line ethics quiz and survey from October 5 to October 23, 2009. Created and produced by the ethics office, the quiz is designed to raise awareness among county employees of the ethics code, the board and its office, and the services they provide. The board believes that education is an effective tool for encouraging ethical practices in King County, and understands that knowledge about the ethics code allows employees to follow its road map for fair dealings. The result is public trust and confidence, which are essential to the valuable work performed by all King County employees.

This year's quiz not only tested employee knowledge of the code, but also allowed participants to provide valuable feedback on ethics resources designed to help them make ethical decisions in their workplace. Individual responses are kept confidential, but results are summarized in the following report.

DISTRIBUTION METHOD AND RESPONSE RATE

Executive Triplett announced the quiz on October 5 via county-wide email voicing his support and inviting participation. All county employees having direct computer access were able to take part. The initial announcement was followed on October 16 with a brief reminder via employee global email. Access to the quiz and survey remained open for three weeks until October 23.

The quiz is designed in an on-line intranet format, meaning that county employees, but not the general public, may take part. This year's quiz program presented problems with access for certain departments with high computer security thresholds, and has helped us to be aware of this challenge and to address it next year. Although there is a very possibility that someone might enter the quiz site more than once, given the number of overall responses, any multiple would have had a minimal impact on the summary results.

Of 11,700 county employees with direct computer access, 2,099 or 18% took the quiz. A special effort was made to provide hard copies to employees unable to access the quiz via computer link. Generally, the number of respondents per department matched the department's relative employee population within county government. Supervisors numbered 26%; non-supervisory participants numbered 74%.

Employees who responded to all quiz and survey questions, and who provided name and contact information in a completely separate submittal, became eligible for a random drawing. From this pool of 1,887 entrants, names were drawn by ethics board member Anne Watanabe to win one of three prizes: Jeremy Dehnert, Transportation, a \$20 certificate at Nordstrom department store; Jason Gallardo, Executive Services, a \$15

certificate at University Bookstore; and Linda Sanders, Public Health, a \$6 certificate for coffee at Tully's.

Because the primary purpose of the survey is educational, rather than as research or as part of an evaluation, the survey was sent to all county employees with computer access. This means that the responses were voluntary, not randomly assigned, and that the survey population may or may not represent the county employee population as a whole. The results are however indicative of employee knowledge and opinions, especially employees with ready computer access, and does not represent the knowledge and opinions of field personnel without access.

EMPLOYEE RESPONSES TO QUIZ QUESTIONS

Overall, employees responded correctly to 8 out of 9 questions; the average overall correct response rate was 94% per participant.

The following are the 13 quiz and survey questions; 'n' represents the total number of responses. The number of responses to each option (e.g. a., b., c.) and percentage of that response to the total is shown. The correct answer and its explanation follow each question.

1. You use a county car to conduct an inspection of a local restaurant. On the way back to the office, you want to stop by the cleaners to pick up your work shirts. The store is on your exact route. What's the right thing to do? (Use of county vehicles) (n=2099)

- a. Take care of the errand on your own time using your own car. (96%)
- b. Park a block from the dry cleaners so no one will know you used a county car. (0%)
- c. Use the county car to do your personal errand on your lunch hour. (2%)
- d. It's so close – there is no harm in stopping off. (2%)

a. Take care of the errand on your own time using your own car.

Explanation: Use of county vehicles is a taxpayer expense and they should not be used for employees' personal errands. Also, when citizens see employees using county vehicles for their personal convenience, they lose trust in our ability to use resources wisely. Employees do the right thing when they use this public-owned property only for official county business. (K.C.C. 3.04.020) Questions? Check with your supervisor or call the Ethics Help Line at 296-1586.

2. We are hard-working employees and are doing our best to continue important county initiatives with fewer resources. Each year, our department holds an annual event that is central to our mission. We have always provided refreshments and paid for them out of our budget. This year, we'd like to ask local businesses to help us out with free snacks and coffee. May we solicit these businesses? (Solicitation of businesses) (n=2099)

Yes: 5%
No: 95%

No. County employees may not solicit goods and services from local businesses to support a county initiative.

Explanation: The Code of Ethics prohibits unauthorized solicitation by county employees so that no person or business in King County feels implicitly coerced to provide aid for government sponsored events. The broad scope of power and authority of King County agencies may make the businesses that are solicited feel they must contribute. This is most obvious in areas where agencies have direct authority over persons being solicited. Employees and agencies may either use approved county funds to purchase the refreshments, or ask for official authorization from the King County Council to solicit for specific events. (K.C.C. 3.04.020)

3. Fran has access to confidential records. She also serves on the board of directors of a non-profit organization that could benefit from the information contained in these records. What should Fran do? (Conflict of interest with outside activity) (n=2099)

- a. Fran should not use or provide the confidential information to the non-profit organization. (10%)
- b. Fran may provide the information to the organization since she is not a paid member of the board and the organization is non-profit. (0%)
- c. Fran should notify her supervisor right away of the potential conflict of interest. (6%)
- d. Both a. and c. (83%)

d. Both a. and c.

Explanation: Fran is in a position of responsibility serving the county and its citizens. She may not use her 'insider' information to benefit another person or organization or herself. Fran now has a potential conflict of interest and has a legal duty to notify her supervisor of the situation. Her supervisor has an equal legal responsibility to resolve the dilemma and respond to Fran in writing. (K.C.C. 3.04.030) Want to check whether your particular situation is a potential conflict? Contact the Ethics Help Line for information at 296-1586.

4. Ken supervises a crew of county employees that paves public streets. At the end of the day, Ken asks crew members to stop by his house to finish paving his new driveway. The house is on the way back to the agency. As Ken's co-worker, how would you advise him? (Values; Use of power or authority for gain) (n=2099)

- a. The crew can do the job because they finished their assigned work early. (0%)
- b. It's okay as long as Ken pays them for the work. (0%)
- c. Using the crew to pave Ken's private driveway is an abuse of his authority. (99%)
- d. As a supervisor, Ken is in charge and can tell the crew to do anything he wants. (0%)

c. Using the crew to pave Ken's private driveway is an abuse of his authority.

Explanation: King County believes that public confidence in government is essential. To ensure that trust, we may not use county resources for our own personal convenience.

In addition, we may not use the power or authority of our position to gain gifts, compensation or other things of value – such as a new driveway – for ourselves or others, unless specifically authorized by law. (K.C.C. 3.04.015 and K.C.C. 3.04.020)

5. You have a co-worker who has a small thriving business selling cosmetics outside of her work for the county. You notice that she sometimes uses her work computer during the lunch hour and after work to prepare invoices and reply to cosmetics orders. Are her activities an ethics violation? (Use of county resources for profit) (n=2099)

- a. No. It doesn't matter what people do on their own time. (1%)
- b. Yes. She is using county resources for profit and should conduct her private business outside of the office, using her own resources. (99%)
- c. No. She has two children and should be commended for being so hard-working! (0%)
- d. Yes. But she's not hurting anyone so what's the problem? (0%)

b. Yes. She is using county resources for profit and should conduct her private business completely outside of the office and using her own resources.

Explanation: Even though your co-worker is not officially on county time during her lunch hour or after hours, she still is using a county computer in a county office building for her private business. These public resources may not be used for private gain or personal profit. (K.C.C. 3.04.020) Some departments may have more stringent rules related to use of county resources depending upon the type of work they do. Check with you supervisor to see what policies are in place in your agency or call the Ethics Help Line at 296-1586.

6. You are a manager and just hired Alicia, who completes your team of engineering specialists. The team members will approve and make recommendations on designs created by Fitzwater Engineering Services, a consultant with your agency. Somehow you didn't notice that Alicia had just left Fitzwater's employment before coming to the county. Are there ethics provisions that cover this kind of situation? (Conflict of interest with past employment) (n=2099)

Yes: 92%
No: 8%

Yes. The code of ethics says that this situation is a conflict of interest.

Explanation: When a new county employee is assigned to work on matters related to his or her former employer, their decision-making could be biased – either for or against that company. There could be at least the appearance of a conflict. So, within one year of entering county employment, new employees in responsible positions may not award a county contract to their former employer and may only participate in other matters related to that company if their appointing authority authorizes that work in a memo that is filed with the Board of Ethics. This helps ensure that there shall be no personal or financial conflict with our public transactions and decisions. (K.C.C. 3.04.030)

7. You are secretary to a division manager. A supervisor from another department stops by your desk and asks you to fax some documents for her. She says that she's in a hurry and could you do it right away? After you've faxed the documents, you notice they are for stock purchases and you know the fax machine should not be used for that purpose. What do you do? (Power of office; use of county resources; duty to notify) (n=2099)

- a. Pull the plug on the fax machine now! (1%)
- b. Send an email to your supervisor right away explaining the situation and asking for resolution. (99%)
- c. Don't tell anyone since you might get into trouble. (0%)
- d. Make a stock buy of your own based on the documents. (0%)

b. Send an email to your supervisor right away explaining the situation and asking for resolution.

Explanation: The supervisor has misused her authority and has placed you in a tough situation. You may feel you have to comply or are uncomfortable challenging her authority. Even if you can address the matter directly with the supervisor, notify your manager in writing of what has occurred. The Code of Ethics requires anyone who feels they may have a conflict of interest to notify their supervisor in writing AND the supervisor is required to resolve the situation and respond back to you. This is a protection for employees and for the reputation of the agency. (K.C.C. 3.04.020 & K.C.C. 3.04.037)

8. Just about every week, there is an email from co-workers to donate to one charity or another – Girls Scout cookies, food banks, clothing drives, or bake sales. When I go into the break room, there are more requests for donations! I believe in giving to charity, but sometimes I feel overwhelmed by it all. What does the ethics code say about all of this solicitation? (Use of county resources; solicitation for charitable organization) (n=2099)

- a. Find a charity of your own and email everyone in the division. (0%)
- b. Eat the cookies, but don't pay for them. (0%)
- c. Donate so your co-workers will like you. (0%)
- d. Charitable solicitation at work is allowed only if it is considered official county business – like the Charitable Campaign or the Heart Walk. (100%)

d. Charitable solicitation at work is allowed if it is considered official county business – like the Employee Giving Program or the Heart Walk.

Explanation: King County supports charitable giving by establishing specific giving opportunities, whether they are annual events such as the Employee Giving Program or the Heart Walk. These initiatives are made official county business through County Council motion or ordinance or executive action. Since we may not use county resources for personal convenience or profit, other charitable solicitation should be conducted on our own time using our own resources. (K.C.C. 3.04.020)

9. Your division director is a vocal supporter of a county incumbent running for office. As you leave the building one day, your director is right in front of you distributing campaign leaflets for her candidate. Although she is standing on a

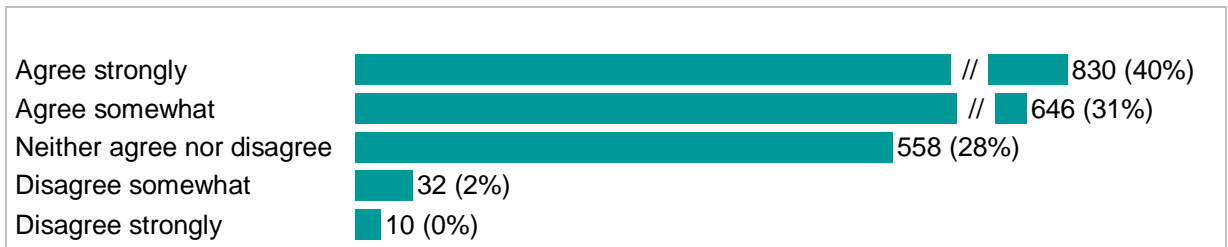
public sidewalk on the lunch hour, what are the ethics issues here? (Campaign activities) (n=2099)

- a. There are no ethics issues here – she’s on her own time on a public sidewalk. (20%)
- b. Everyone has a right to support the candidate of his or her choice. (2%)
- c. Using the power or authority to influence or coerce another person to provide someone with a thing of value (e.g. vote) is a violation of the ethics code. (77%)
- d. The ethics code only talks about signing petitions. (1%)

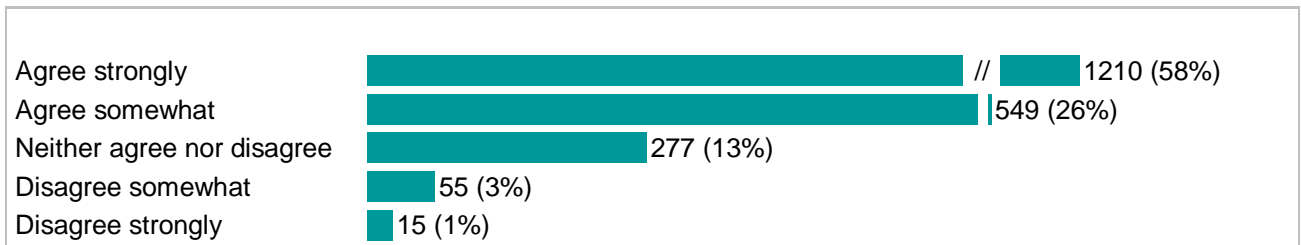
c. Using the power or authority of your office or position to influence or coerce another person to provide them or another person with a thing of value (e.g. vote) is a violation of the ethics code.

Explanation: Supervisors or elected officials may exert influence and power over those who report to them. They should use this authority wisely and appropriately and never in order to gain something of value for themselves or another. If you have concerns, report such incidents to another supervisor or your human resources personnel or contact the Ethics Help Line at 296-1586. (K.C.C. 3.04.020)

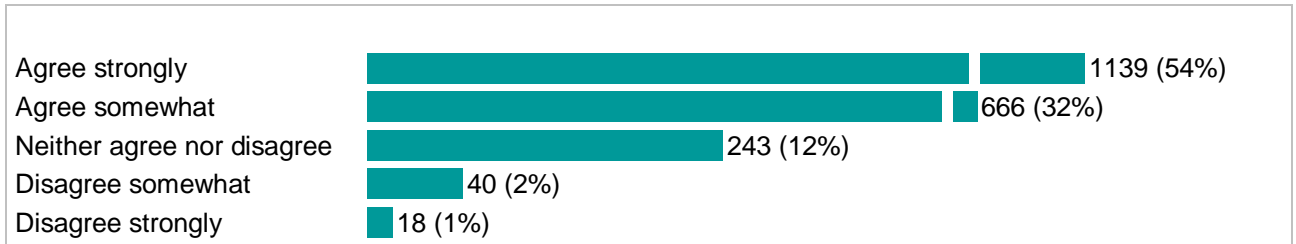
10. King County’s Board of Ethics Web site is helpful in identifying and dealing with ethical issues relating to my job. (n= 2099)



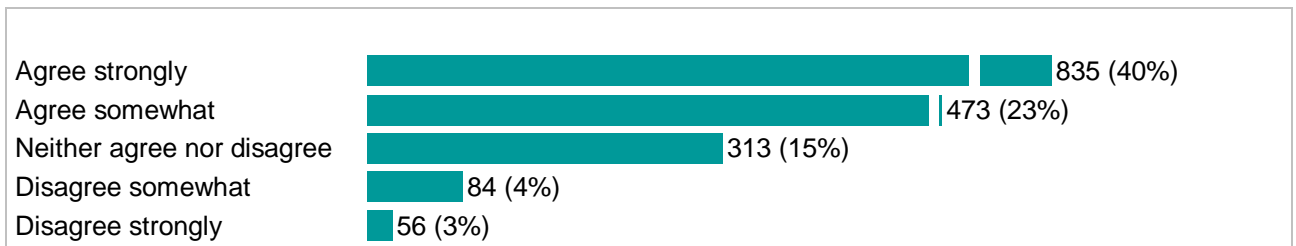
11. I believe the Ethics Office/Board of Ethics would honor my request for confidentiality. (n=2099)



12. I believe the Ethics Office/Board of Ethics would help me successfully resolve an ethical issue. (n=2099)



13. I know about the Ethics Help Line that I can call to discuss concerns or report unethical conduct. (n=2099)



Note: 364 (17%) stated that they had not encountered any appropriate situations to use the Help Line.

Your department

Generally, the number of respondents per department matched the department's relative employee population within county government, especially considering certain departments have a significant number of employees without direct access to computers (e.g. Transportation).

Do you supervise others?

YES: 26% NO: 74%

CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

- The consistently high number of employees who voluntarily take part in the annual ethics quiz and survey indicates that employees have a significant interest in workplace ethics.
- Employees have a solid, basic understanding of the King County Code of Ethics demonstrated by the high percentage of correct responses to questions.

- Resources provided by the Board of Ethics and its office are helpful to county employees, provide them with a way to discuss concerns or report unethical conduct, honor their confidentiality, and assist them in successfully resolving ethical dilemmas in the workplace.
- The on-going ethics awareness campaign works for employees and serves to prevent violations of the Code of Ethics.

~Helping Employees Make Ethical Decisions~