County of Erie

MARK C. POLONCARZ
COMPTROLLER

May 31, 2007

Hon. Joel A. Giambra
County Executive
95 Franklin Street, 16th Floor
Buffalo, New York 14202

John Greenan
Commissioner of Personnel
95 Franklin Street, 6th Floor
Buffalo, New York 14202

Joseph Gervase
Director of Information and Support Services
95 Franklin Street, 15th Floor
Buffalo, New York 14202

Re: Internal Revenue Service Policy on Mobile Telephones for Employees

Dear County Executive Giambra, Commissioner Greenan and Mr. Gervase:

I am writing to bring to your attention Internal Revenue Service ("IRS") guidelines and policy for employer-issued wireless telephones and to offer an opinion regarding actions that Erie County ("County") may wish to initiate to ensure the County is not in violation of IRS policies.

Under United States Code Title 26 § 280F (d) (4) (A) (v), wireless phones issued and paid for by employers are considered "listed property." Treasury Regulations Section 1.274-5T (b) (6), a copy of which is attached herein, notes that listed property is considered a taxable benefit to employees unless the employer and employee can show that the phone is being used solely for the business purpose. The IRS views employer-issued mobile phones in the same way they consider employer-issued vehicles for employees – it is taxable income to the recipient.

For example, if the County issues a mobile phone to an employee, the market value of the phone, the monthly service charges as well as the value of the individual calls would be included as taxable income even if the County has a policy prohibiting personal phone calls. In order to exclude the value of the phone and calls from an employee's taxable income the County must (1) require the employee to keep records that distinguish business from personal phone calls, (2) the employee must keep such records, and (3) the County must routinely audit said records to ensure

no personal calls were made. If such a scenario occurred, the employee would not have included as taxable income the value of the business calls, but would then be held liable for tax purposes for the value of the personal calls. A copy of an IRS document providing guidance on this issue is also attached herein for your review.

As my office's 2006 audit on wireless devices demonstrated, the County does not currently, nor has it ever in recent memory, required employees to separate and log their personal phone calls from official County business calls. In addition, the County has not, and does not audit and monitor these billing and call records for employee compliance. Given administrative and management issues in County government, and the sheer number of phone records that would have to be continually audited, I do not believe the County could properly monitor the phones and monthly call records. Accordingly, it is my belief that if the IRS conducted an audit of Erie County's wireless program, the County would not be in compliance with IRS guidelines and every employee would be subject to having the value of their phone and calls included as taxable income for the present and all past years.

Obviously, this has serious implications to the County and its employees. As you know, in April 2006 my office issued a comprehensive audit of the County's wireless devices. One of the main findings of that audit was that County employees routinely use their County-issued and County-funded wireless devices for personal use – a practice we decried. The audit also found that many wireless devices and wireless calling plans were purchased by the County and distributed to County employees without careful oversight, and at a not insignificant cost to the County. We recommended a significant reduction in the number of wireless devices and suggested reducing the number of employees allowed to have such devices.

Following the audit, your administration initiated some steps to examine the County's provision of wireless devices. During that process, which was started by then-Director of Budget, Management and Finance Kenneth Vetter, your administration suggested one option to address the large number of wireless devices and reduce County expense was to terminate most or all County-purchased phones and plans. Under that concept, the County would simply provide certain County employees who are deemed to need wireless devices for the daily performance of their duties with a monthly cash payment/allowance, and they could then purchase their own phone and plan. Those employees could then use the phones for both business and personal use.

This concept would offer numerous benefits and advantages to the County: (1) the County would not need to purchase mobile wireless devices and plans, significantly reducing administrative tasks and personnel expense in the Division of Information and Support Services; (2) the County's costs would be reduced by compelling employees to pay for their personal usage and/or use of special features (like ring tones, text messaging, downloads, long distance usage, etc.); (3) the County could reduce administrative costs in various departments through not needing staff to monitor mobile phone assignments and bills; (4) the County would eliminate a potential negative audit issue within the County's annual independent audit and management letter; and (5) the County would be in compliance with the IRS regarding the listed property guidelines.

In order to be in compliance with the IRS guidelines on listed property, there are many entities, including public entities and universities that now provide taxable allowances or cash to employees to enable them to purchase their own phones for both employer and personal use, and no longer provide employer-issued or paid phones. For instance, at the University of Utah, Weber State University, and University of Florida, employees who are required or need to have a mobile wireless device as part of their employment are required to purchase phones that can be used for both business and personal use, and employees receive a taxable allowance to cover the business expense of the devices.

Obviously, County employees will be concerned about this issue and the potential requirement that they need to individually purchase phones and calling plans. I am not unmindful of that factor. However, if we continue with the current practice, any employee that possesses a County issued cell phone will need to have the value of the phone, the wireless service and the calls made included as taxable income to the employee.

While there is also a likelihood that some County-issued and paid wireless phones will need to be retained for some employees, for most the County could possibly arrange with a wireless provider for a bulk discount for phones and calling plans, making those discounts available to County employees as a cost-saving measure. The alternative is to require each employee with a County issued and paid phone to document each and every telephone call every month as business or personal and for the County to routinely audit and closely monitor each employee's monthly phone bills. In such a situation, if a personal call is made then the value of that call (and perhaps the percentage value of the phone for that call) must be included taxable income to the employee.

In my opinion, based on the number of issued phones, past patterns and employee behavior, the burden to the County to audit and monitor each and every phone call and to then pursue each individual employee for payments for personal calls is not a realistic option. Given the potential consequences to the County of not following IRS guidelines on listed property, and based also on my 2006 audit findings, my recommendation is to move to an allowance process. That will help keep the County in compliance and help prevent waste, fraud and abuse of County resources.

In summary, I recommend you immediately resume your analysis of the County's wireless program, consider terminating almost all but a select few County wireless devices, and instead provide allowances to those employees who need a phone for official County business. In doing so, I believe we will be in compliance with IRS guidelines and federal law and will also reduce County expense for said devices.

My staff is available to discuss this matter with you. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Michael R. Szukala, Deputy Comptroller-Audit at 858-8430.

Sincerely yours,

Mark C. Poloncarz, Esq.
Erie County Comptroller

Attachment

cc: Vallie M. Ferraraccio, Director of Purchase
Laurence K. Rubin, Esq., County Attorney
George Loncar, Director of Labor Relations
Joan Bender, President, CSEA Local 815
John Orlando, President, AFSCME Local 1095
Valerie Turner, NYSNA
Ronald Lucas, President, Teamsters Local 264
Michael Summers, Jr., President, Erie County Sheriff PBA
Erie County Legislature
Timothy B. Howard, Sheriff
Kathy Hochul, County Clerk
Frank J. Clark, District Attorney

expenses for the business use of a vehicle.

(2) *Allowances for expenses described.* An allowance for expenses is described in this paragraph (g)(2) if it is a—

(i) Reimbursement arrangement covering ordinary and necessary expenses of traveling away from home (exclusive of transportation expenses to and from destination);

(ii) Per diem allowance providing for ordinary and necessary expenses of traveling away from home (exclusive of transportation costs to and from destination); or

(iii) Mileage allowance providing for ordinary and necessary expenses of local transportation and transportation to, from, and at the destination while traveling away from home.

(h) [Reserved]. For further guidance, see §1.274–5T(h).

(i) [Reserved]

(j) *Authority for optional methods of computing certain expenses*—(1) *Meal expenses while traveling away from home.* The Commissioner may establish a method under which a taxpayer may use a specified amount or amounts for meals while traveling away from home in lieu of substantiating the actual cost of meals. The taxpayer will not be relieved of the requirement to substantiate the actual cost of other travel expenses as well as the time, place, and business purpose of the travel. See paragraphs (b)(2) and (c) of this section.

(2) *Use of mileage rates for vehicle expenses.* The Commissioner may establish a method under which a taxpayer may use mileage rates to determine the amount of the ordinary and necessary expenses of using a vehicle for local transportation and transportation to, from, and at the destination while traveling away from home in lieu of substantiating the actual costs. The method may include appropriate limitations and conditions in order to reflect more accurately vehicle expenses over the entire period of usage. The taxpayer will not be relieved of the requirement to substantiate the amount of each business use (i.e., the business mileage), or the time and business purpose of each use. See paragraphs (b)(2) and (c) of this section.

(3) *Incidental expenses while traveling away from home.* The Commissioner may establish a method under which a taxpayer may use a specified amount or amounts for incidental expenses paid or incurred while traveling away from home in lieu of substantiating the actual cost of incidental expenses. The taxpayer will not be relieved of the requirement to substantiate the actual cost of other travel expenses as well as the time, place, and business purpose of the travel.

(k)–(l) [Reserved]. For further guidance, see §1.274–5T(k) and (l).

(m) *Effective date.* This section applies to expenses paid or incurred after December 31, 1997. However, paragraph (j)(3) of this section applies to expenses paid or incurred after September 30, 2002.

[T.D. 8864, 65 FR 4122, Jan. 26, 2000; 65 FR 15547, Mar. 23, 2000, as amended by T.D. 9020, 67 FR 68513, Nov. 12, 2002; T.D.9064, 68 FR 39011, July 1, 2003]

§1.274–5T Substantiation requirements (temporary).

(a) *In general.* For taxable years beginning on or after January 1, 1986, no deduction or credit shall be allowed with respect to—

(1) Traveling away from home (including meals and lodging),

(2) Any activity which is of a type generally considered to constitute entertainment, amusement, or recreation, or with respect to a facility used in connection with such an activity, including the items specified in section 274(e),

(3) Gifts defined in section 274(b), or

(4) Any listed property (as defined in section 280F(d)(4) and §1.280F–6T(b)), unless the taxpayer substantiates each element of the expenditure or use (as described in paragraph (b) of this section) in the manner provided in paragraph (c) of this section. This limitation supersedes the doctrine found in *Cohan v. Commissioner*, 39 F. 2d 540 (2d Cir. 1930). The decision held that, where the evidence indicated a taxpayer incurred deductible travel or entertainment expenses but the exact amount could not be determined, the court should make a close approximation and not disallow the deduction entirely. Section 274(d) contemplates that no deduction or credit shall be allowed a

taxpayer on the basis of such approximations or unsupported testimony of the taxpayer. For purposes of this section, the term *entertainment* means entertainment, amusement, or recreation, and use of a facility therefor; and the term *expenditure* includes expenses and items (including items such as losses and depreciation).

(b) *Elements of an expenditure or use*—(1) *In general.* Section 274(d) and this section contemplate that no deduction or credit shall be allowed for travel, entertainment, a gift, or with respect to listed property unless the taxpayer substantiates the requisite elements of each expenditure or use as set forth in this paragraph (b).

(2) *Travel away from home.* The elements to be provided with respect to an expenditure for travel away from home are—

(i) *Amount.* Amount of each separate expenditure for traveling away from home, such as cost of transportation or lodging, except that the daily cost of the traveler's own breakfast, lunch, and dinner and of expenditures incidental to such travel may be aggregated, if set forth in reasonable categories, such as for meals, for gasoline and oil, and for taxi fares;

(ii) *Time.* Dates of departure and return for each trip away from home, and number of days away from home spent on business;

(iii) *Place.* Destinations or locality of travel, described by name of city or town or other similar designation; and

(iv) *Business purpose.* Business reason for travel or nature of the business benefit derived or expected to be derived as a result of travel.

(3) *Entertainment in general.* The elements to be proved with respect to an expenditure for entertainment are—

(i) *Amount.* Amount of each separate expenditure for entertainment, except that such incidental items as taxi fares or telephone calls may be aggregated on a daily basis;

(ii) *Time.* Date of entertainment;

(iii) *Place.* Name, if any, address or location, and destination of type of entertainment, such as dinner or theater, if such information is not apparent from the designation of the place;

(iv) *Business purpose.* Business reason for the entertainment or nature of business benefit derived or expected to be derived as a result of the entertainment and, except in the case of business meals described in section 274(e)(1), the nature of any business discussion or activity;

(v) *Business relationship.* Occupation or other information relating to the person or persons entertained, including name, title, or other designation, sufficient to establish business relationship to the taxpayer.

(4) *Entertainment directly preceding or following a substantial and bona fide business discussion.* If a taxpayer claims a deduction for entertainment directly preceding or following a substantial and bona fide business discussion on the ground that such entertainment was associated with the active conduct of the taxpayer's trade or business, the elements to be proved with respect to such expenditure, in addition to those enumerated in paragraph (b)(3) (i), (ii), (iii), and (v) of this section are—

(i) *Time.* Date and duration of business discussion;

(ii) *Place.* Place of business discussion;

(iii) *Business purpose.* Nature of business discussion, and business reason for the entertainment or nature of business benefit derived or expected to be derived as the result of the entertainment.

(iv) *Business relationship.* Identification of those persons entertained who participated in the business discussion.

(5) *Gifts.* The elements to be proved with respect to an expenditure for a gift are—

(i) *Amount.* Cost of the gift to the taxpayer;

(ii) *Time.* Date of the gift;

(iii) *Description.* Description of the gift;

(iv) *Business purpose.* Business reason for the gift or nature of business benefit derived or expected to be derived as a result of the gift; and

(v) *Business relationship.* Occupation or other information relating to the recipient of the gift, including name, title, or other designation, sufficient to establish business relationship to the taxpayer.

(6) *Listed property.* The elements to be proved with respect to any listed property are—

(i) *Amount*—(A) *Expenditures.* The amount of each separate expenditure with respect to an item of listed property, such as the cost of acquisition, the cost of capital improvements, lease payments, the cost of maintenance and repairs, or other expenditures, and

(B) *Uses.* The amount of each business/investment use (as defined in §1.280F–6T (d)(3) and (e)), based on the appropriate measure (i.e., mileage for automobiles and other means of transportation and time for other listed property, unless the Commissioner approves an alternative method), and the total use of the listed property for the taxable period.

(ii) *Time.* Date of the expenditure or use with respect to listed property, and

(iii) *Business or investment purpose.* The business purpose for an expenditure or use with respect to any listed property (see §1.274–5T(c)(6)(i) (B) and (C) for special rules for the aggregation of expenditures and business use and §1.280F–6T(d)(2) for the distinction between qualified business use and business/investment use).

See also §1.274–5T(e) relating to the substantiation of business use of employer-provided listed property and §1.274–6T for special rules for substantiating the business/investment use of certain types of listed property.

(c) *Rules of substantiation*—(1) *In general.* Except as otherwise provided in this section and §1.274–6T, a taxpayer must substantiate each element of an expenditure or use (described in paragraph (b) of this section) by adequate records or by sufficient evidence corroborating his own statement. Section 274(d) contemplates that a taxpayer will maintain and produce such substantiation as will constitute proof of each expenditure or use referred to in section 274. Written evidence has considerably more probative value than oral evidence alone. In addition, the probative value of written evidence is greater the closer in time it relates to the expenditure or use. A contemporaneous log is not required, but a record of the elements of an expenditure or of a business use of listed property made at or near the time of the expenditure or use, supported by sufficient documentary evidence, has a high degree of credibility not present with respect to a statement prepared subsequent thereto when generally there is a lack of accurate recall. Thus, the corroborative evidence required to support a statement not make at or near the time of the expenditure or use must have a high degree of probative value to elevate such statement and evidence to the level of credibility reflected by a record made at or near the time of the expenditure or use supported by sufficient documentary evidence. The substantiation requirements of section 274(d) are designed to encourage taxpayers to maintain the records, together with documentary evidence, as provided in paragraph (c)(2) of this section.

(2) *Substantiation by adequate records*—(i) *In general.* To meet the "adequate records" requirements of section 274(d), a taxpayer shall maintain an account book, diary, log, statement of expense, trip sheets, or similar record (as provided in paragraph (c)(2)(ii) of this section), and documentary evidence (as provided in paragraph (c)(2)(iii) of this section) which, in combination, are sufficient to establish each element of an expenditure or use specified in paragraph (b) of this section. It is not necessary to record information in an account book, diary, log, statement of expense, trip sheet, or similar record which duplicates information reflected on a receipt so long as the account book, etc. and receipt complement each other in an orderly manner.

(ii) *Account book, diary, etc.* An account book, diary, log, statement of expense, trip sheet, or similar record must be prepared or maintained in such manner that each recording of an element of an expenditure or use is made at or near the time of the expenditure or use.

(A) *Made at or near the time of the expenditure or use.* For purposes of this section, the phrase *made at or near the time of the expenditure or use* means the element of an expenditure or use are recorded at a time when, in relation to the use or making of an expenditure, the taxpayer has full present knowledge of each element of the expenditure or use, such as the amount, time, place, and business purpose of the expenditure and business relationship. An

expense account statement which is a transcription of an account book, diary, log, or similar record prepared or maintained in accordance with the provisions of this paragraph (c)(2)(ii) shall be considered a record prepared or maintained in the manner prescribed in the preceding sentence if such expense account statement is submitted by an employee to his employer or by an independent contractor to his client or customer in the regular course of good business practice. For example, a log maintained on a weekly basis, which accounts for use during the week, shall be considered a record made at or near the time of such use.

(B) *Substantiation of business purpose.* In order to constitute an adequate record of business purpose within the meaning of section 274(d) and this paragraph (c)(2), a written statement of business purpose generally is required. However, the degree of substantiation necessary to establish business purpose will vary depending upon the facts and circumstances of each case. Where the business purpose is evident from the surrounding facts and circumstances, a written explanation of such business purpose will not be required. For example, in the case of a salesman calling on customers on an established sales route, a written explanation of the business purpose of such travel ordinarily will not be required. Similarly, in the case of a business meal described in section 274(e)(1), if the business purpose of such meal is evident from the business relationship to the taxpayer of the persons entertained and other surrounding circumstances, a written explanation of such business purpose will not be required.

(C) *Substantiation of business use of listed property—(1) Degree of substantiation.* In order to constitute an adequate record (within the meaning of section 274(d) and this paragraph (c)(2)(ii)), which substantiates business/investment use of listed property (as defined in §1.280F–6T(d)(3)), the record must contain sufficient information as to each element of every business/investment use. However, the level of detail required in an adequate record to substantiate business/investment use may vary depending upon the facts and circumstances. For example, a taxpayer who uses a truck for both business and personal purposes and whose only business use of a truck is to make deliveries to customers on an established route may satisfy the adequate record requirement by recording the total number miles driven during the taxable year, the length of the delivery route once, and the date of each trip at or near the time of the trips. Alternatively, the taxpayer may establish the date of each trip with a receipt, record of delivery, or other documentary evidence.

(*2*) *Written record.* Generally, an adequate record must be written. However, a record of the business use of listed property, such as a computer or automobile, prepared in a computer memory device with the aid of a logging program will constitute an adequate record.

(D) *Confidential information.* If any information relating to the elements of an expenditure or use, such as place, business purpose, or business relationship, is of a confidential nature, such information need not be set forth in the account book, diary, log, statement of expense, trip sheet, or similar record, provided such information is recorded at or near the time of the expenditure or use and is elsewhere available to the district director to substantiate such element of the expenditure or use.

(iii) [Reserved]. For further guidance, see §1.274–5(c)(2)(iii).

(iv) *Retention of written evidence.* The Commissioner may, in his discretion, prescribe rules under which an employer may dispose of the adequate records and documentary evidence submitted to him by employees who are required to, and do, make an adequate accounting to the employer (within the meaning of paragraph (f)(4) of this section) if the employer maintains adequate accounting procedures with respect to such employees (within the meaning of paragraph (f)(5) of this section.

(v) *Substantial compliance.* If a taxpayer has not fully substantiated a particular element of an expenditure or use, but the taxpayer establishes to the satisfaction of the district director that he has substantially complied

with the "adequate records" requirements of this paragraph (c)(2) with respect to the expenditure or use, the taxpayer may be permitted to establish such element by evidence which the district director shall deem adequate.

(3) *Substantiation by other sufficient evidence*—(i) *In general.* If a taxpayer fails to establish to the satisfaction of the district director that he has substantially complied with the "adequate records" requirements of paragraph (c)(2) of this section with respect to an element of an expenditure or use, then, except as otherwise provided in this paragraph, the taxpayer must establish such element—

(A) By his own statement, whether written or oral, containing specific information in detail as to such element; and

(B) By other corroborative evidence sufficient to establish such element.

If such element is the description of a gift, or the cost or amount, time, place, or date of an expenditure or use, the corroborative evidence shall be direct evidence, such as a statement in writing or the oral testimony of persons entertained or other witnesses setting forth detailed information about such element, or the documentary evidence described in paragraph (c)(2) of this section. If such element is either the business relationship to the taxpayer of persons entertained, or the business purpose of an expenditure, the corroborative evidence may be circumstantial evidence.

(ii) *Sampling*—(A) *In general.* Except as provided in paragraph (c)(3)(ii)(B) of this section, a taxpayer may maintain an adequate record for portions of a taxable year and use that record to substantiate the business/investment use of listed property for all or a portion of the taxable year if the taxpayer can demonstrate by other evidence that the periods for which an adequate record is maintained are representative of the use for the taxable year or a portion thereof.

(B) *Exception for pooled vehicles.* The sampling method of paragraph (c)(3)(ii)(A) of this section may not be used to substantiate the business/investment use of an automobile or other vehicle of an employer that is made available for use by more than one employee for all or a portion of a taxable year.

(C) *Examples.* The following examples illustrate this paragraph (c)(3)(ii).

Example 1. A, a sole proprietor and calendar year taxpayer, operates an interior decorating business out of her home. A uses an automobile for local business travel to visit the homes or offices of clients, to meet with suppliers and other subcontractors, and to pick up and deliver certain items to clients when feasible. There is no other business use of the automobile but A and other members of her family also use the automobile for personal purposes. A maintains adequate records for the first three months of 1986 that indicate that 75 percent of the use of the automobile was in A's business. Invoices from subcontractors and paid bills indicate that A's business continued at approximately the same rate for the remainder of 1986. If other circumstances do not change (e.g., A does not obtain a second car for exclusive use in her business), the determination that the business/investment use of the automobile for the taxable year is 75 percent is based on sufficient corroborative evidence.

Example 2. The facts are the same as in *Example 1*, except that A maintains adequate records during the first week of every month, which indicate that 75 percent of the use of the automobile is in A's business. The invoices from A's business indicate that A's business continued at the same rate during the subsequent weeks of each month so that A's weekly records are representative of each month's business use of the automobile. Thus, the determination that the business/investment use of the automobile for the taxable year is 75 percent is based on sufficient corroborative evidence.

Example 3. B, a sole proprietor and calendar year taxpayer, is a salesman in a large metropolitan area for a company that manufactures household products. For the first three weeks of each month, B uses his own automobile occasionally to travel within the metropolitan area on business. During these three weeks, B's use of the automobile for business purposes does not follow a consistent pattern from day to day or week to week. During the fourth week of each month, B delivers to his customers all the orders taken during the previous month. B's use of his automobile for business purposes, as substantiated by adequate records, is 70 percent of the total use during that fourth week. In this example, a determination based on the records maintained during that fourth week that the business/investment use of the automobile for the taxable year is 70 percent is not based on sufficient corroborative evidence because use during this week is not representative of use during other periods.

(iii) *Special rules.* See §1.274–6T for special rules for substantiation by sufficient corroborating evidence with respect to certain listed property.

(4) *Substantiation in exceptional circumstances.* If a taxpayer establishes that, by reason of the inherent nature of the situation—

(i) He was unable to obtain evidence with respect to an element of the expenditure or use which conforms fully to the "adequate records" requirements of paragraph (c)(2) of this section,

(ii) He is unable to obtain evidence with respect to such element which conforms fully to the "other sufficient evidence" requirements of paragraph (c)(3) of this section, and

(iii) He has presented other evidence, with respect to such element, which possesses the highest degree of probative value possible under the circumstances, such other evidence shall be considered to satisfy the substantiation requirements of section 274(d) and this paragraph.

(5) *Loss of records due to circumstances beyond control of the taxpayer.* Where the taxpayer establishes that the failure to produce adequate records is due to the loss of such records through circumstances beyond the taxpayer's control, such as destruction by fire, flood, earthquake, or other casualty, the taxpayer shall have a right to substantiate a deduction by reasonable reconstruction of his expenditures or use.

(6) *Special rules*—(i) *Separate expenditure or use*—(A) *In general.* For the purposes of this section, each separate payment or use by the taxpayer shall ordinarily be considered to constitute a separate expenditure. However, concurrent or repetitious expenses or uses may be substantiated as a single item. To illustrate the above rules, where a taxpayer entertains a business guest at dinner and thereafter at the theater, the payment for dinner shall be considered to constitute one expenditure and the payment for the tickets for the theater shall be considered to constitute a separate expenditure. Similarly, if during a day of business travel a taxpayer makes separate payments for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, he shall be considered to have made three separate expenditures. However, if during entertainment at a cocktail lounge the taxpayer pays separately for each serving of refreshments, the total amount expended for the refreshments will be treated as a single expenditure. A tip may be treated as a separate expenditure.

(B) *Aggregation of expenditures.* Except as otherwise provided in this section, the account book, diary, log, statement of expense, trip sheet, or similar record required by paragraph (c)(2)(ii) of this section shall be maintained with respect to each separate expenditure and not with respect to aggregate amounts for two or more expenditures. Thus, each expenditure for such items as lodging and air or rail travel shall be recorded as a separate item and not aggregated. However, at the option of the taxpayer, amounts expended for breakfast, lunch, or dinner, may be aggregated. A tip or gratuity which is related to an underlying expense may be aggregated with such expense. In addition, amounts expended in connection with the use of listed property during a taxable year, such as for gasoline or repairs for an automobile, may be aggregated. If these expenses are aggregated, the taxpayer must establish the date and amount, but need not prove the business purpose of each expenditure. Instead, the taxpayer may prorate the expenses based on the total business use of the listed property. For other provisions permitting recording of aggregate amounts in an account book, diary, log, statement of expense, trip sheet, or similar record, see paragraphs (b)(2)(i) and (b)(3) of this section (relating to incidental costs of travel and entertainment).

(C) *Aggregation of business use.* Uses which may be considered part of a single use, for example, a round trip or uninterrupted business use, may be accounted for by a single record. For example, use of a truck to make deliveries at several different locations which begins and ends at the business premises and which may include a stop at the business premises in between two deliveries may be accounted for by a single record of miles driven. In addition, use of a passenger automobile by a salesman for a business trip away from home over a period of time may

be accounted for by a single record of miles traveled. De minimis personal use (such as a stop for lunch on the way between two business stops) is not an interruption of business use.

(ii) *Allocation of expenditure.* For purposes of this section, if a taxpayer has established the amount of an expenditure, but is unable to establish the portion of such amount which is attributable to each person participating in the event giving rise to the expenditure, such amount shall ordinarily be allocated to each participant on a pro rata basis, if such determination is material. Accordingly, the total number of persons for whom a travel or entertainment expenditure is incurred must be established in order to compute the portion of the expenditure allocable to such person.

(iii) *Primary use of a facility.* Section 274(a) (1)(B) and (2)(C) deny a deduction for any expenditure paid or incurred before January 1, 1979, with respect to a facility, or paid or incurred before January 1, 1994, with respect to a club, used in connection with an entertainment activity unless the taxpayer establishes that the facility (including a club) was used primarily for the furtherance of the taxpayer's trade or business. A determination whether a facility before January 1, 1979, or a club before January 1, 1994, was used primarily for the furtherance of the taxpayer's trade or business will depend upon the facts and circumstances of each case. In order to establish that a facility was used primarily for the furtherance of his trade or business, the taxpayer shall maintain records of the use of the facility, the cost of using the facility, mileage or its equivalent (if appropriate), and such other information as shall tend to establish such primary use. Such records of use shall contain—

(A) For each use of the facility claimed to be in furtherance of the taxpayer's trade or business, the elements of an expenditure specified in paragraph (b)(3) of this section, and

(B) For each use of the facility not in furtherance of the taxpayer's trade or business, an appropriate description of such use, including cost, date, number of persons entertained, nature of entertainment and, if applicable, information such as mileage or its equivalent. A notation such as "personal use" or "family use" would, in the case of such use, be sufficient to describe the nature of entertainment.

If a taxpayer fails to maintain adequate records concerning a facility which is likely to serve the personal purposes of the taxpayer, it shall be presumed that the use of such facility was primarily personal.

(iv) *Additional information.* In a case where it is necessary to obtain additional information, either—

(A) To clarify information contained in records, statements, testimony, or documentary evidence submitted by a taxpayer under the provisions of paragraph (c)(2) or (c)(3) of this section, or

(B) To establish the reliability or accuracy of such records, statements, testimony, or documentary evidence, the district director may, notwithstanding any other provision of this section, obtain such additional information by personal interview or otherwise as he determines necessary to implement properly the provisions of section 274 and the regulations thereunder.

(7) *Specific exceptions.* Except as otherwise prescribed by the Commissioner, substantiation otherwise required by this paragraph is not required for—

(i) Expenses described in section 274(e)(2) relating to food and beverages for employees, section 274(e)(3) relating to expenses treated as compensation, section 274(e)(8) relating to items available to the public, and section 274(e)(9) relating to entertainment sold to customers, and

(ii) Expenses described in section 274(e)(5) relating to recreational, etc., expenses for employees, except that a taxpayer shall keep such records or other evidence as shall establish that such expenses were for activities (or facilities used in connection therewith) primarily for the benefit of employees other than employees who are officers, shareholders or other owners (as defined in section 274(e)(5)), or highly compensated employees.

(d) *Disclosure on returns*—(1) *In general.* The Commissioner may, in his discretion, prescribe rules under which any taxpayer claiming a deduction or credit for entertainment, gifts, travel,

or with respect to listed property, or any other person receiving advances, reimbursements, or allowances for such items, shall make disclosure on his tax return with respect to such items. The provisions of this paragraph shall apply notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (f) of this section.

(2) *Business use of passenger automobiles and other vehicles.* (i) On returns for taxable years beginning after December 31, 1984, taxpayers that claim a deduction or credit with respect to any vehicle are required to answer certain questions providing information about the use of the vehicle. The information required on the tax return relates to mileage (total, business, commuting, and other personal mileage), percentage of business use, date placed in service, use of other vehicles, after-work use, whether the taxpayer has evidence to support the business use claimed on the return, and whether or not the evidence is written.

(ii) Any employer that provides the use of a vehicle to an employee must obtain information from the employee sufficient to complete the employer's tax return. Any employer that provides more than five vehicles to its employees need not include any information on its return. The employer, instead, must obtain the information from its employees, indicate on its return that it has obtained the information, and retain the information received. Any employer—

(A) That can satisfy the requirements of §1.274–6T(a)(2), relating to vehicles not used for personal purposes,

(B) That can satisfy the requirements of §1.274–6T(a)(3), relating to vehicles not used for personal purposes other than commuting, or

(C) That treats all use of vehicles by employees as personal use need not obtain information with respect to those vechicles, but instead must indicate on its return that it has vehicles exempt from the requirements of this paragraph (d)(2).

(3) *Business use of other listed property.* On returns for taxable years beginning after December 31, 1984, taxpayers that claim a deduction or credit with respect to any listed property other than a vehicle (for example, a yacht, airplane, or certain computers) are required to provide the following information:

(i) The date that the property was placed in service,

(ii) The percentage of business use,

(iii) Whether evidence is available to support the percentage of business use claimed on the return, and

(iv) Whether the evidence is written.

(e) *Substantiation of the business use of listed property made available by an employer for use by an employee*—(1) *Employee*—(i) *In general.* An employee may not exclude from gross income as a working condition fringe any amount of the value of the availability of listed property provided by an employer to the employee, unless the employee substantiates for the period of availability the amount of the exclusion in accordance with the requirements of section 274(d) and either this section or §1.274–6T.

(ii) *Vehicles treated as used entirely for personal purposes.* If an employer includes the value of the availability of a vehicle (as defined in §1.61–21(e)(2)) in an employee's gross income without taking into account any exclusion for a working condition fringe allowable under section 132 and the regulations thereunder with respect to the vehicle, the employee must substantiate any deduction claimed under §§1.162–25 and 1.162–25T for the business/investment use of the vehicle in accordance with the requirements of section 274(d) and either this section or §1.274–6T.

(2) *Employer*—(i) *In general.* An employer substantiates its business/investment use of listed property by showing either—

(A) That, based on evidence that satisfies the requirements of section 274(d) or statements submitted by employees that summarize such evidence, all or a portion of the use of the listed property is by employees in the employer's trade or business and, if any employee used the property for personal purposes, the employer included an appropriate amount in the employee's income, or

(B) In the case of a vehicle, the employer treats all use by employees as personal use and includes an appropriate amount in the employees' income.

(ii) *Reliance on employee records.* For purposes of substantiating the business/investment use of listed property that an employer provides to an employee and for purposes of the information required by paragraph (d)(2) and (3) of this section, the employer may rely on adequate records maintained by the employee or on the employee's own statement if corroborated by other sufficient evidence unless the employer knows or has reason to know that the statement, records, or other evidence are not accurate. The employer must retain a copy of the adequate records maintained by the employee or the other sufficient evidence, if available. Alternatively, the employer may rely on a statement submitted by the employee that provides sufficient information to allow the employer to determine the business/investment use of the property unless the employer knows or has reason to know that the statement is not based on adequate records or on the employee's own statement corroborated by other sufficient evidence. If the employer relies on the employee's statement, the employer must retain only a copy of the statement. The employee must retain a copy of the adequate records or other evidence.

(f) *Reporting and substantiation of expenses of certain employees for travel, entertainment, gifts, and with respect to listed property*—(1) *In general.* The purpose of this paragraph is to provide rules for reporting and substantiation of certain expenses paid or incurred by employees in connection with the performance of services as employees. For purposes of this paragraph, the term *business expenses* means ordinary and necessary expenses for travel, entertainment, gifts, or with respect to listed property which are deductible under section 162, and the regulations thereunder, to the extent not disallowed by section 262, 274(c), and 280F. Thus, the term *business expenses* does not include personal, living, or family expenses disallowed by section 262, travel expenses disallowed by section 274(c), or cost recovery deductions and credits with respect to listed property disallowed by section 280F(d)(3) because the use of such property is not for the convenience of the employer and required as a condition of employment. Except as provided in paragraph (f)(2), advances, reimbursements, or allowances for such expenditures must be reported as income by the employee.

(2) *Reporting of expenses for which the employee is required to make an adequate accounting to his employer*—(i) *Reimbursements equal to expenses.* For purposes of computing tax liability, an employee need not report on his tax return business expenses for travel, transportation, entertainment, gifts, or with respect to listed property, paid or incurred by him solely for the benefit of his employer for which he is required to, and does, make an adequate accounting to his employer (as defined in paragraph (f)(4) of this section) and which are charged directly or indirectly to the employer (for example, through credit cards) or for which the employee is paid through advances, reimbursements, or otherwise, provided that the total amount of such advances, reimbursements, and charges is equal to such expenses.

(ii) *Reimbursements in excess of expenses.* In case the total of the amounts charged directly or indirectly to the employer or received from the employer as advances, reimbursements, or otherwise, exceeds the business expenses paid or incurred by the employee and the employee is required to, and does, make an adequate accounting to his employer for such expenses, the employee must include such excess (including amounts received for expenditures not deductible by him) in income.

(iii) *Expenses in excess of reimbursements.* If an employee incurs deductible business expenses on behalf of his employer which exceed the total of the amounts charged directly or indirectly to the employer and received from the employer as advances, reimbursements, or otherwise, and the employee makes an adequate accounting to his employer, the employee must be able to substantiate any deduction for such excess with such records and supporting evidence as will substantiate each element of an expenditure (described in paragraph (b) of this section) in accordance with paragraph (c) of this section.

(3) *Reporting of expenses for which the employee is not required to make an adequate accounting to his employer.* If the employee is not required to make an adequate accounting to his employer for his business expenses or, though required, fails to make an adequate accounting for such expenses, he must submit, as a part of his tax return, the appropriate form issued by the Internal Revenue Service for claiming deductions for employee business expenses (e.g., Form 2106, Employee Business Expenses, for 1985) and provide the information requested on that form, including the information required by paragraph (d)(2) and (3) of this section if the employee's business expenses are with respect to the use of listed property. In addition, the employee must maintain such records and supporting evidence as will substantiate each element of an expenditure or use (described in paragraph (b) of this section) in accordance with paragraph (c) of this section.

(4) [Reserved]. For further guidance, see § 1.274–5(f)(4).

(5) *Substantiation of expenditures by certain employees.* An employee who makes an adequate accounting to his employer within the meaning of this paragraph will not again be required to substantiate such expense account information except in the following cases:

(i) An employee whose business expenses exceed the total of amounts charged to his employer and amounts received through advances, reimbursements or otherwise and who claims a deduction on his return for such excess,

(ii) An employee who is related to his employer within the meaning of section 267(b), but for this purpose the percentage referred to in section 267(b)(2) shall be 10 percent, and

(iii) Employees in cases where it is determined that the accounting procedures used by the employer for the reporting and substantiation of expenses by such employees are not adequate, or where it cannot be determined that such procedures are adequate. The district director will determine whether the employer's accounting procedures are adequate by considering the facts and circumstances of each case, including the use of proper internal controls. For example, an employer should require that an expense account be verified and approved by a reasonable person other than the person incurring such expenses. Accounting procedures will be considered inadequate to the extent that the employer does not require an adequate accounting from his employees as defined in paragraph (f)(4) of this section, or does not maintain such substantiation. To the extent an employer fails to maintain adequate accounting procedures he will thereby obligate his employees to substantiate separately their expense account information.

(g) [Reserved]. For further guidance, see § 1.274–5(g).

(h) *Reporting and substantiation of certain reimbursements of persons other than employees*—(1) *In general.* The purpose of this paragraph is to provide rules for the reporting and substantiation of certain expenses for travel, entertainment, gifts, or with respect to listed property paid or incurred by one person (hereinafter termed "independent contractor") in connection with services performed for another person other than an employer (hereinafter termed "client or customer") under a reimbursement or other expense allowance arrangement with such client or customer. For purposes of this paragraph, the term *business expenses* means ordinary and necessary expenses for travel, entertainment, gifts, or with respect to listed property which are deductible under section 162, and the regulations thereunder, to the extent not disallowed by sections 262 and 274(c). Thus, the term *business expenses* does not include personal, living, or family expenses disallowed by section 262 or travel expenses disallowed by section 274(c), and reimbursements for such expenditures must be reported as income by the independent contractor. For purposes of this paragraph, the term *reimbursements* means advances, allowances, or reimbursements received by an independent contractor for travel, entertainment, gifts, or with respect to listed property in connection with the performance by him of services for his client or customer, under a reimbursement or other expense allowance arrangement with his client or customer, and includes amounts charged directly

or indirectly to the client or customer through credit card systems or otherwise. See paragraph (j) of this section relating to the substantiation of meal expenses while traveling away from home.

(2) *Substantiation by independent contractors.* An independent contractor shall substantiate, with respect to his reimbursements, each element of an expenditure (described in paragraph (b) of this section) in accordance with the requirements of paragraph (c) of this section; and, to the extent he does not so substantiate, he shall include such reimbursements in income. An independent contractor shall so substantiate a reimbursement for entertainment regardless of whether he accounts (within the meaning of paragraph (h)(3) of this section) for such entertainment.

(3) *Accounting to a client or customer under section 274(e)(4)(B).* Section 274(e)(4)(B) provides that section 274(a) (relating to disallowance of expenses for entertainment) shall not apply to expenditures for entertainment for which an independent contractor has been reimbursed if the independent contractor accounts to his client or customer, to the extent provided by section 274(d). For purposes of section 274(e)(4)(B), an independent contractor shall be considered to account to his client or customer for an expense paid or incurred under a reimbursement or other expense allowance arrangement with his client or customer if, with respect to such expense for entertainment, he submits to his client or customer adequate records or other sufficient evidence conforming to the requirements of paragraph (c) of this section.

(4) *Substantiation by client or customer.* A client or customer shall not be required to substantiate, in accordance with the requirements of paragraph (c) of this section, reimbursements to an independent contractor for travel and gifts, or for entertainment unless the independent contractor has accounted to him (within the meaning of section 274(e)(4)(B) and paragraph (h)(3) of this section) for such entertainment. If an independent contractor has so accounted to a client or customer for entertainment, the client or customer shall substantiate each element of the expenditure (as described in paragraph (b) of this section) in accordance with the requirements of paragraph (c) of this section.

(i) [Reserved]

(j) [Reserved]. For further guidance, *see* § 1.274–5(j).

(k) *Exceptions for qualified nonpersonal use vehicles*—(1) *In general.* The substantiation requirements of section 274(d) and this section do not apply to any qualified nonpersonal use vehicle (as defined in paragraph (k)(2) of this section).

(2) *Qualified nonpersonal use vehicle*—(i) *In general.* For purposes of section 274(d) and this section, the term *qualified nonpersonal use vehicle* means any vehicle which, by reason of its nature (i.e., design), is not likely to be used more than a de minimis amount for personal purposes.

(ii) *List of vehicles.* Vehicles which are qualified nonpersonal use vehicles include the following—

(A) Clearly marked police and fire vehicles (as defined and to the extent provided in paragraph (k)(3) of this section),

(B) Ambulances used as such or hearses used as such,

(C) Any vehicle designed to carry cargo with a loaded gross vehicle weight over 14,000 pounds,

(D) Bucket trucks (''cherry pickers''),

(E) Cement mixers,

(F) Combines,

(G) Cranes and derricks,

(H) Delivery trucks with seating only for the driver, or only for the driver plus a folding jump seat,

(I) Dump trucks (including garbage trucks),

(J) Flatbed trucks,

(K) Forklifts,

(L) Passenger buses used as such with a capacity of at least 20 passengers,

(M) Qualified moving vans (as defined in paragraph (k)(4) of this section),

(N) Qualified specialized utility repair trucks (as defined in paragraph (k)(5) of this section),

(O) Refrigerated trucks,

(P) School buses (as defined in section 4221(d)(7)(C)),

(Q) Tractors and other special purpose farm vehicles,

(R) Unmarked vehicles used by law enforcement officers (as defined in

paragraph (k)(6) of this section) if the use is officially authorized, and

(S) Such other vehicles as the Commissioner may designate.

(3) *Clearly marked police or fire vehicles.* A police or fire vehicle is a vehicle, owned or leased by a governmental unit, or any agency or instrumentality thereof, that is required to be used for commuting by a police officer or fire fighter who, when not on a regular shift, is on call at all times, provided that any personal use (other than commuting) of the vehicle outside the limit of the police officer's arrest powers or the fire fighter's obligation to respond to an emergency is prohibited by such governmental unit. A police or fire vehicle is clearly marked if, through painted insignia or words, it is readily apparent that the vehicle is a police or fire vehicle. A marking on a license plate is not a clear marking for purposes of this paragraph (k).

(4) *Qualified moving van.* The term *qualified moving van* means any truck or van used by a professional moving company in the trade or business of moving household or business goods if—

(i) No personal use of the van is allowed other than for travel to and from a move site (or for de minimis personal use, such as a stop for lunch on the way between two move sites),

(ii) Personal use for travel to and from a move site is an irregular practice (i.e., not more than five times a month on average), and

(iii) Personal use is limited to situations in which it is more convenient to the employer, because of the location of the employee's residence in relation to the location of the move site, for the van not to be returned to the employer's business location.

(5) *Qualified specialized utility repair truck.* The term *qualified specialized utility repair truck* means any truck (not including a van or pickup truck) specifically designed and used to carry heavy tools, testing equipment, or parts if—

(i) The shelves, racks, or other permanent interior construction which has been installed to carry and store such heavy items is such that it is unlikely that the truck will be used more than a de minimis amount for personal purposes, and

(ii) The employer requires the employee to drive the truck home in order to be able to respond in emergency situations for purposes of restoring or maintaining electricity, gas, telephone, water, sewer, or steam utility services.

(6) *Unmarked law enforcement vehicles*—(i) *In general.* The substantiation requirements of section 274(d) and this section do not apply to officially authorized uses of an unmarked vehicle by a "law enforcement officer". To qualify for this exception, any personal use must be authorized by the Federal, State, county, or local governmental agency or department that owns or leases the vehicle and employs the officer, and must be incident to law-enforcement functions, such as being able to report directly from home to a stakeout or surveillance site, or to an emergency situation. Use of an unmarked vehicle for vacation or recreation trips cannot qualify as an authorized use.

(ii) *Law enforcement officer.* The term *law enforcement officer* means an individual who is employed on a full-time basis by a governmental unit that is responsible for the prevention or investigation of crime involving injury to persons or property (including apprehension or detention of persons for such crimes), who is authorized by law to carry firearms, execute search warrants, and to make arrests (other than merely a citizen's arrest), and who regularly carries firearms (except when it is not possible to do so because of the requirements of undercover work). The term *law enforcement officer* may include an arson investigator if the investigator otherwise meets the requirements of this paragraph (k)(6)(ii), but does not include Internal Revenue Service special agents.

(7) *Trucks and vans.* The substantiation requirements of section 274(d) and this section apply generally to any pickup truck or van, unless the truck or van has been specially modified with the result that it is not likely to be used more than a de minimis amount for personal purposes. For example, a van that has only a front bench for seating, in which permanent shelving

that fills most of the cargo area has been installed, that constantly carries merchandise or equipment, and that has been specially painted with advertising or the company's name, is a vehicle not likely to be used more than a de minimis amount for personal purposes.

(8) *Examples.* The following examples illustrate the provisions of paragraph (k)(3) and (6) of this section:

Example 1. Detective C, who is a "law enforcement officer" employed by a state police department, headquartered in city M, is provided with an unmarked vehicle (equipped with radio communication) for use during off-duty hours because C must be able to communicate with headquarters and be available for duty at any time (for example, to report to a surveillance or crime site). The police department generally has officially authorized personal use of the vehicle by C but has prohibited use of the vehicle for recreational purposes or for personal purposes outside the state. Thus, C's use of the vehicle for commuting between headquarters or a surveillance site and home and for personal errands is authorized personal use as described in paragraph (k)(6)(i) of this section. With respect to these authorized uses, the vehicle is not subject to the substantiation requirements of section 274(d) and the value of these uses is not included in C's gross income.

Example 2. Detective T is a "law enforcement officer" employed by city M. T is authorized to make arrests only within M's city limits. T, along with all other officers on the force, is ordinarily on duty for eight hours each work day and on call during the other sixteen hours. T is provided with the use of a clearly marked police vehicle in which T is required to commute to his home in city M. The police department's official policy regarding marked police vehicles prohibits personal use (other than commuting) of the vehicles outside the city limits. When not using the vehicle on the job, T uses the vehicle only for commuting, personal errands on the way between work and home, and personal errands within city M. All use of the vehicle by T conforms to the requirements of paragraph (k)(3) of this section. Therefore, the value of that use is excluded from T's gross income as a working condition fringe and the vehicle is not subject to the substantiation requirements of section 274(d).

(l) *Definitions.* For purposes of section 274(d) and this section, the terms *automobile* and *vehicle* have the same meanings as prescribed in §1.61–21(d)(1)(ii) and §1.61–21(e)(2), respectively. Also, for purposes of section 274(d) and this section, the terms *employer*, *"employee*, and *personal use* have the same meanings as prescribed in §1.274–6T(e).

(m) *Effective date.* Section 274(d), as amended by the Tax Reform Act of 1984 and Public Law 99–44, and this section (except as provided in paragraph (d)(2) and (3) of this section) apply with respect to taxable years beginning after December 31, 1985. Section 274(d) and this section apply to any deduction or credit claimed in a taxable year beginning after December 31, 1985, with respect to any listed property, regardless of the taxable year in which the property was placed in service. However, except as provided in §1.132–5(h) with respect to qualified nonpersonal use vehicles, the substantiation requirements of section 274(d) and this section do not apply to the determination of an employee's working condition fringe exclusion or to the determination under §1.162–25(b) of an employee's deduction before the date that those requirements apply, under this paragraph (m), to the employer, if the employer is taxable. Paragraph (j)(3) of this section applies to expenses paid or incurred after September 30, 2002.

[T.D. 8061, 50 FR 46014, Nov. 6, 1985; as amended by T.D. 8063, 50 FR 52312, Dec. 23, 1985; T.D. 8276, 54 FR 51027, Dec. 12, 1989; T.D. 8451, 57 FR 57669, Dec. 7, 1992; T.D. 8601, 60 FR 36995, July 19, 1995; T.D. 8715, 62 FR 13990, Mar. 25, 1997; T.D. 8864, 65 FR 4123, Jan. 26, 2000; T.D. 9020, 67 FR 68513, Nov. 12, 2002; T.D. 9020, 67 FR 72273, Dec. 4, 2002; T.D. 9064, July 1, 2003]

§1.274–6 Expenditures deductible without regard to trade or business or other income producing activity.

The provisions of §§1.274–1 through 1.274–5, inclusive, do not apply to any deduction allowable to the taxpayer without regard to its connection with the taxpayer's trade or business or other income producing activity. Examples of such items are interest, taxes such as real property taxes, and casualty losses. Thus, if a taxpayer owned a fishing camp, the taxpayer could still deduct mortgage interest and real property taxes in full even if deductions for its use are not allowable under section 274(a) and §1.274–2. In the case of a taxpayer which is not an individual, the provisions of this section

Internal Revenue Service
United States Department of the Treasury

Employee Cell Phones

Government employers frequently provide their employees with cellular telephones and pagers to employees to conduct business. This can raise special tax concerns, due to the fact that these items are listed property under the Internal Revenue Code, and because employees may use them for business as well as personal use.

What is Listed Property?

"Listed property" includes items obtained for use in a business but designated by the Internal Revenue Code as lending themselves easily to personal use. This includes automobiles, computers, and entertainment or recreation-related items. In 1989, cellular telephones were added to this category. Although the use of these phones is much more widespread and economical today, they remain listed property and are subject to these restrictions.

For a for-profit business, the designation of an item as listed property has implications for depreciation deductions taken by the business and the computation of net income. However, this article focuses on the employment tax issues raised for employees of government entities.

Substantiation Requirements

To be able to exclude the use by an employee from taxable income from an employer-owned cell phone, the employer must have some method to require the employee to keep records that distinguish business from personal phone charges. If the telephone is used exclusively for business, all use is excludable from income (as a working condition fringe benefit). The amount that represents personal use is included in the wages of the employee. This includes individual personal calls, as well as a pro rata share of monthly service charges.

In general, this means that unless the employer has a policy requiring employees to keep records, or the employee does not keep records, the value of the use of the phone will be income to the employee.

At a minimum, the employee should keep a record of each call and its business purpose. If calls are itemized on a monthly statement, they should be identifiable as personal or business, and the employee should retain any supporting evidence of the business calls. This information should be submitted to the employer, who must maintain these records to support the exclusion of the phone use from the employee's wages.

The following situations illustrate the application of the rules:

Example 1: A municipal government provides an employee a cell phone for business purposes. The government's written policy prohibits personal use of the phone. The government routinely audits the employee's phone billings to confirm that personal calls were not made. No personal calls were actually made by the employee. The business use of the phone is not taxable to the employee.

Example 2. A municipal government provides an employee a cell phone for business purposes. The government's written policy prohibits personal use of the phone. However, the government does not audit phone use to verify exclusive business use. The fair market value of the phone, plus each monthly service charge and any individual call charges are taxable income to the employee, reportable on Form W-2.

Example 3: A state agency provides an employee with a cell phone and pays the monthly service charge. The employee is required to highlight personal calls on the monthly bill. The employee is then required to timely reimburse the agency for the cost of the personal calls, and the employee is charged a pro rata share of the monthly charge. The value of the business use portion of the phone is not taxable to the employee.

Employee-Owned Telephones

If the employee owns the phone, the listed property requirements do not apply. Any amounts the employer reimburses the employee for business use of the employee's own phone may be excludable from wages if the employee accounts for the expense under the accountable plan rules. See Publication 15, Employer's Tax Guide (Circular E), for more information about the accountable plan rules.