

# New ethics courses awaiting county employees, city officials

By VANESSA ZAMBRANO

A new online ethics course is ready for the almost 30,000 Miami-Dade County employees to take. Elected officials from all municipalities in the county will also have to undergo ethics training through a different course, tailored for them.

Last year the county's Commission on Ethics and Public Trust backed new legislation that requires all county employees to take a new ethics course, along with newly hired workers as part of their initial training. A course was provided before, but the new one will be expanded and more comprehensive, said Joseph M. Centorino, ethics commission executive director. "It's a much more in-depth, sophisticated course."

The new course was videotaped over two sessions last year in front of a live audience of a total of 100 county employees. After much editing of raw material, the three-hour video is now ready and the ethics commission is working on making it available to workers on their website.

One benefit of not having live training is that employees don't have to watch it all at one time. They can watch one of the seven segments or all of them if they have time, Mr. Centorino said. At the end of each segment they'll take a quiz in order to move forward, but they will have to go through the entire course, he said.

"This is the only realistic way to do the training for this number of employees," he said.

The ordinance states that employees must take a refresher course every two years.

Topics addressed in the course include an overview of ethics on the part of public servants; information about the ethics commission; most provisions covered in the county's code of ethics ordinance, such as outside employment; penalties and consequences of violations; public records, and Sunshine Law, among others, Mr. Centorino said.

Just last month the county commission passed another ordinance requiring that all elected officials in Miami-Dade municipalities take an ethics course within 90 days of being sworn in, he said.

"We already did it in North Miami because they just had an election. It was our first one," Mr. Centorino said.

The municipal course differs from the one aimed at county employees and is being tailored for these kinds of positions and for different cities within the county, he said. "There are different standards, stricter conflict of interest regulations."

Another ethics course that the commission has been providing since last year is for lobbyists. All new lobbyists must pay a \$100 fee to take the four-hour live course within 60 days of their registry, Mr. Centorino said. By November last year about 137 lobbyists had completed their ethics training, and now close to 540 have done so.

Courses are offered once a month with as many as 80 or 90

people in a single session, especially earlier this year, he said.

"We show them a video of Jack Abramoff, the lobbyist that disgraced lobbyists and went to prison," Mr. Centorino said in reference to a Washington lobbyist who was convicted on corruption charges in 2006.

Even though the lobbyist course covers some of the same issues as the one provided to county employees, it teaches them about the lobbyists' provisions, about what they are permitted or not permitted to do in terms of gift-giving, all ordinances and some state laws, Sunshine and public records law, a section on bribery, and the code of silence, which "prohibits certain oral communications regarding a particular RFP [request for proposal], RFQ [request for qualifications] or bid during the period the cone is in effect," according to the county.

The lobbyists take quiz at the end, Mr. Centorino said, and the commission has received good responses so far.



Photo by Mison in U.S. via

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