

# Integrity Spotlight

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## Advisory Misuse of public sector resources

Public sector resources are resources that are purchased, owned or controlled by public authorities and made available to public officers for official purposes. The Commission regularly deals with allegations that public sector resources have been misused.

### When am I using a public sector resource?

When thinking about what is considered a public sector resource, most people think of physical things that are needed to perform a role such as computers, mobile phones, stationery, vehicles, tools and equipment. However, it is important to consider how you are using both tangible and intangible public resources.

The Commission has dealt with a broad range of matters, including allegations that public officers had:

- used government car parks for personal use
- used government resources to conduct their own businesses, to engage in outside employment, or to participate in volunteer work during work time (using office equipment and supplies, and using work time to take phone calls, respond to emails and prepare quotes)
- not disposed of surplus property in line with policy, for example, selling surplus iPads and other IT equipment to staff at heavily discounted prices
- used government vehicles for personal use
- used public assets and supplies for personal use at home, including tools and equipment, fuel and mulch
- failed to return property when separating from an agency, for example, mobile phones, lap tops and other IT equipment
- used the government internet to access inappropriate content
- used a government issued mobile phone and phone number to advertise and operate a private business
- over-ordered supplies to enable excess consumables to be used for personal use

Public sector agencies must ensure they have policies and procedures in place that align with the principles of the Act and the Code of Ethics.

## Who is responsible?

The *Public Sector Act 2009* requires the public sector to *manage resources effectively, prudently and in a fully accountable manner*.<sup>1</sup> The Code of Ethics for the South Australian Public sector is issued in accordance with the Act, and applies to all public sector employees. It states that:

*Public sector employees shall use the Government/public resources that are the property of the Crown efficiently and only for appropriate purposes as authorised. Government/public resources (Crown property) include physical, financial, technological and intellectual property. The Crown retains ownership of these resources.*<sup>2</sup>

Public sector agencies must ensure they have policies and procedures in place that align with the principles of the Act and the Code of Ethics. Agencies must ensure its officers understand their responsibilities at induction and through ongoing communication and training.

Policies and procedures should provide guidance for:

- the acceptable use of assets eg. ICT equipment, phones, fleet vehicles, car parks etc
- the acceptable use of government purchase cards and fuel cards
- the acceptable use of government email and internet
- the approval and declaration of secondary employment
- the process for disposing of assets
- the employee exit process (to ensure equipment, purchase cards and security access cards are returned and system access rights are cancelled)
- asset management practices (labelling, recording and tracking the allocation and location of assets)

It may be appropriate for public officers to sign an acknowledgement of policies, particularly if they are using resources such as purchase cards, fuel cards and fleet vehicles on a regular basis.

It may be reasonable for agencies to allow its officers to use some resources for limited personal use. This might include a limited amount of personal phone calls, internet use or email. However, it is important that the relevant policies provide sufficient guidance around what is considered reasonable personal use.

Public officers must ensure they understand their obligations and responsibilities regarding the use of public resources.

<sup>1</sup> *Public Sector Act 2009* (SA) Part 3 (5) (4).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.publicsector.sa.gov.au/hr-and-policy-support/code-of-ethics> p.7.

## Detecting misuse

If public officers observe resources being misused, or suspect that it is occurring, it ought to be reported in line with their agency's reporting processes, or to the Office of Public Integrity.

Agencies must also have in place mechanisms to detect the misuse of resources. These can include:

- maintaining adequate records of resources provided to employees such as laptops, mobile phones, fuel cards etc. Label and regularly audit the location of these items.
- develop systems for the effective tracking of resources used by multiple employees. This could include shared laptops and other ICT equipment, or tools and machinery often used by local government. Items should be clearly labelled, recorded on an asset register with a record of who is assigned responsibility for the item and its return.
- regularly remind employees to declare secondary employment and periodically review existing approvals.
- monitor internet use and emails to detect excessive or inappropriate personal use.
- reconcile timesheet records with attendance audits (include building access audits where appropriate).
- monitor and audit car park and fleet vehicle use. Consider using GPS technology to assist where appropriate.
- develop systems for identifying unusual increases in supplies being ordered without an operational need and monitor quantities ordered against reasonable use.
- develop a risk register and regularly review risks to ensure controls are adequate.

## Further information

The Code of Ethics for the South Australian Public sector

<https://www.publicsector.sa.gov.au/hr-and-policy-support/code-of-ethics>

Office for Public Integrity South Australia:

<https://www.publicintegrity.sa.gov.au/>

Independent Commission Against Corruption, *Buy Now, Lie Later: Corruption risks in the management of government issued purchase cards*

<https://www.icac.sa.gov.au/publications/published-reports/Buy-Now-Lie-Later>


Independent Commission Against Corruption, *Keeping Time: The Importance of Accurate Timesheets*


<https://www.icac.sa.gov.au/documents/Keeping-Time>

Independent Commission Against Corruption, *Managing risk through the separation process*

<https://www.icac.sa.gov.au/documents/web-Integrity-Spotlight-Advisory-Managing-risk-through-the-separation-process.pdf>

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