

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20229



U.S. Customs and
Border Protection

NOV - 3 2004

VIA FACSIMILE

Mr. T.J. Bonner
President
National Border Patrol Council
P.O. Box 678 C
Campo, CA 91906

Re: Awards and Recognition

Dear Mr. Bonner:

As you are aware, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) was created for the primary purpose of integrating the missions and functions of each of its legacy component organizations into a single, unified agency responsible for detecting and preventing terrorist and terrorist weapons from entering the United States, while continuing legacy component traditional missions and facilitating the orderly and efficient flow of legitimate trade and people. In order to ensure the successful accomplishment of this mission and to meet the requirements of the Homeland Security Act, CBP has undertaken initiatives to integrate and unify CBP's operational workforce both within and between the ports of entry.

Upon the assimilation of four legacy agencies into CBP, managers were confronted with multiple awards and recognition policies for its workforce. As CBP continues to strive toward "One Face at the Border" it has become increasingly obvious that managers cannot effectively apply separate awards policies. Furthermore, attempting to operate under differing and contradictory legacy component awards policies and procedures diverts significant resources and employee attention away from critical operational functions. In addition to the administrative burdens of operating multiple awards systems, the differences in the systems and the outcomes in terms of employee financial recognition result in perceived and sometimes real inequities in the workplace. These inequities can impact employee morale and productivity. Such diversions are detrimental to CBP's primary anti-terrorism mission, increasing the risk that potential terrorist, terrorist weapons or components would be undeterred and go undetected, resulting in real or perceived harm to our nation's economic stability and/or its citizens.

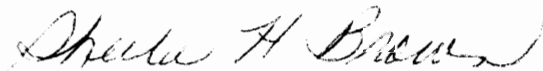
To avoid this unacceptable outcome and ensure maximum operational efficiency while fostering a unified workforce, CBP has found it necessary to place all employees under a unified system to fairly award and recognize employees for exceptional performance.

When CBP was created, a single consistent approach for issuing awards and recognizing employees was implemented for non-bargaining unit personnel. Effective December 2, 2004, this policy will be implemented for all personnel in CBP. For your information, a copy of this policy is enclosed.

In order to ensure CBP's continued success in efficiently and effectively meeting its mission requirements, CBP must move forward with this change in an expedited manner. As a result, CBP stands ready to meet and discuss the impact and implementation of this policy upon request prior to December 2, 2004, and will continue to do so on a post-implementation basis.

CBP appreciates your organization's support of CBP's unification initiatives. Further correspondence regarding this issue should be directed to myself. I may be reached by telephone at (202) 344-3309 or by e-mail at SHEILA.H.BROWN@dhs.gov.

Sincerely,



Sheila H. Brown
Director, Labor Relations

Enclosure

U. S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION AWARDS POLICY

PHILOSOPHY: Recognition of employee accomplishments is an important element in effective workforce management. Awards are used to recognize significant employee accomplishments and/or achievements that are clearly above and beyond what is normally expected. Successful completion of assigned tasks or short-term projects should be acknowledged as part of performance feedback from supervisors, but would not merit a cash award. Rather, awards should be reserved for truly exceptional contributions that further CBP's organizational goals and the effective accomplishment of its mission.

PRACTICE:

Performance-based Cash Awards

Generally, granting performance-based cash awards should coincide with the annual evaluation of an employee's performance at the end of each fiscal year. These awards should be granted in recognition of performance excellence over an extended period of time. When completing the annual performance review, supervisors and managers should determine whether or not an employee's performance during the rating cycle merits a cash award. Clearly, not all employees will have demonstrated performance at a level sufficient to warrant a cash award; simply recording a "successful" rating should not automatically guarantee an award.

Criteria: Eligibility criteria for performance-based cash awards may be any or all of the following:

- Employee's contributions/achievements substantially surpassed performance goals;
- Employee's performance over the rating cycle contributed directly to unit cost reductions and/or increases in operational effectiveness;
- Employee's performance over the rating cycle exemplified CBP's core values.

Special Act /On-the-Spot Cash Awards

Supervisors and managers also have flexibility in recognizing significant, one-time employee achievements throughout the rating cycle. In contrast to performance-based awards that recognize performance excellence over an extended period of time, Special Act or On-the-Spot Awards may be used to recognize short-term accomplishments in a regularly assigned position, during a detail, or at the conclusion of a successful special project assignment. When a Special Act or On-the-Spot Award is granted for accomplishments performed within an employee's job responsibilities, the act or service must significantly exceed normal expectations and cannot have served wholly or in part as the basis for a current or previous performance-based cash award.

Criteria: The following are examples that may justify a Special Act or On-the-Spot Award:

- Achievement that contributed significantly to more efficient or economical operations involving tangible savings;
- Exemplary or courageous action in an emergency situation related to official duties;
- Improvement of service to the public in a specific or measurable way;
- Performance of added or emergency assignments in addition to regular duties.

Honorary and Non-Traditional Awards

Throughout the year, supervisors and managers will identify and wish to acknowledge lesser, but still notable, employee accomplishments by granting honorary or non-traditional awards. Honorary awards include items with the CBP seal, logo or another specially designed inscription related to the CBP mission/work, ranging from those approved and conferred by the Commissioner to smaller recognition items such as paperweights. In addition to these awards, supervisors have the authority to give such non-traditional awards as theater tickets or merchandise up to \$100.00 per award item, but no more than a total of \$400.00 per employee per calendar year.

Criteria: The following are examples that may justify honorary or non-traditional recognition:

- Making a high quality contribution involving a difficult or important project or assignment;
- Using initiative and creativity to improve a product, activity, program or service;
- Demonstrating exceptional courtesy or responsiveness in dealing with colleagues or customers.

Quality Step Increases

Quality Step Increases (QSIs) increase an employee's basic rate of pay from one step in the grade to the next higher step. The granting of these awards must be done responsibly and judiciously, with awareness of their long-term financial impact on budgets.

Criteria: QSIs should only be granted when an employee has met *all* the criteria listed below:

- Employee receives a "successful" rating of record;
- Employee demonstrates performance significantly above that expected for the position as determined by the following criteria:
 - Displays outstanding performance to meet organizational goals or improves the efficiency, effectiveness, and economy of the Government;
 - Excels in all critical performance areas as documented by specific examples;

- Exhibits timeliness in performance;
- Employee has been in the position and grade for at least 52 weeks (see prohibitions below), and;
- Employee's level of exceptional performance is expected to continue in the future.

Prohibitions on Granting QSIs: The following list outlines when it is inappropriate to grant a QSI:

- *To recognize an employee for doing his/her job.* Salaries accomplish this and QSIs (as well as cash awards) are for contributions that are clearly above and beyond what is expected.
- *To recognize an employee for short-term accomplishments.* QSIs are reserved for the recognition of sustained performance excellence over time.
- *When an employee has been or could be sufficiently recognized through other awards.* If another award option is appropriate or could adequately recognize the employee's contribution, QSIs should not be used.
- *When an employee has received a QSI within the preceding 52 consecutive calendar weeks.* Granting QSIs more frequently than every 52 consecutive calendar weeks is prohibited by regulation.
- *When an employee has been reassigned to a position with significantly different duties or earned a permanent promotion in the preceding 52 consecutive calendar weeks.* As part of the eligibility criteria, an employee must be in their current position and grade for at least 52 weeks in order to receive a QSI.

Combining QSIs with Cash Awards: In only the rarest of circumstances would an employee be recognized with both a cash award and a QSI. A general rule is that if an employee can be adequately recognized for sustained performance excellence with a cash award, use a cash award. However, if an employee received a Special Act cash award in recognition of a specific achievement and has consistently performed at an extraordinary level over time, a QSI may be a viable option to recognize that sustained outstanding performance.

AWARD AMOUNTS: There is no established minimum amount for a cash award, but the award should be meaningful to the employee and commensurate with the achievement being recognized.

DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY:

Cash Awards: Assistant Commissioners, and the Chief, Office of Border Patrol are delegated the authority to approve cash awards up to \$5,000. Assistant Commissioners and the Chief, Office of Border Patrol, may delegate the authority

to approve cash awards of up to \$2,500 to Principal Field Officers (i.e., Directors, Field Operations and Chief Patrol Agents).

Quality Step Increases: Assistant Commissioners and the Chief, Office of Border Patrol are delegated the authority to approve QSIs; that authority may not be re-delegated.

Honorary Awards: Supervisors or managers may write a justification and order an honorary award item from the National Awards Program in Headquarters.

Non-Traditional Awards: Supervisors should follow local procurement and budgetary procedures and guidelines to purchase such non-traditional awards as tickets to local events.