

DECISION

**THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL
OF THE UNITED STATES**
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20548

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FILE: B-215108**DATE:** July 23, 1984**MATTER OF:** Office of Personnel Management - Purchase
of Air Purifiers

DIGEST: Purchase of 10 air purifiers for a large "open space" office area at Office of Personnel Management does not violate rule against purchasing equipment for personal benefit of individual employees, since the purifiers will benefit all individuals entering that area of the building.

This is in response to a request from William M. Hunt, Associate Director for Administration, Office of Personnel Management (OPM), for an advance decision as to whether the purchase of air purifiers for "open space" offices is a personal expense which may not be paid for with appropriated funds. For the reasons stated below, the proposed purchase is authorized.

FACTS

The workspace of OPM's Office of Management Support was recently altered from private offices to an "open space" configuration. As a result, employees who are heavy smokers now occupy the same area as employees who are adversely affected by tobacco smoke. In order to relieve this problem, OPM's Assistant Director of the Office of Management Support has requisitioned 10 air purifiers at a total cost of approximately \$300.

The Assistant Director recommends that the requisition be approved on the basis that, under these circumstances, the air purifiers are in the same category as air conditioning, heating, lighting and other equipment which makes an office area habitable. He states that the equipment is expected to improve the overall air quality in a large office area.

ANALYSIS

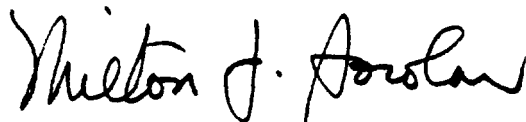
We have long applied the rule that items which are classified as personal expenses may not be purchased with appropriated funds without specific statutory authority. 3 Comp. Gen. 433 (1924); B-187246, June 15, 1977. Recently, we applied this rule to the purchase of an air purifier

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where the device was to be installed in an individual employee's private office to relieve that employee's allergy symptoms. 61 Comp. Gen. 634 (1982). (The employee in question had not claimed nor was he found to be "handicapped," as defined by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended and its implementing regulations. See 63 Comp. Gen. 114 (1983).) We compared the proposed purchase to previous agency-approved purchases of air purifiers. The earlier purchases had been for installation in a conference room and grand jury hearing room. While not expressly stating that the agency's earlier purchases were appropriate, we distinguished them from the one then under consideration on the basis that the proposed purchase benefited no one but the allergic employee. 61 Comp. Gen. at 636-637.

In comparison, we held in 62 Comp. Gen. 653 (1983), that the purchase of air purifiers for a Department of Interior reading room used by both Government employees and members of the public was authorized. We held that the purchase was proper since the air purifiers would benefit all users of the room as well as improving the working conditions of employees who worked in the area. We also noted the agency's stated expectation that employee morale would improve due to the reduction in tobacco smoke.

In this case, we think the purchase of 10 air purifiers for the general benefit of all people entering this OPM work area constitutes an expense similar to the one we approved in 62 Comp. Gen. 653 (1983). The air purification of a large office area where the benefit accrues to a group of employees as well as other people having business in the area is analogous to air purification of a reading room where the benefit is for groups of employees as well as outsiders having occasion to visit the room. Under these circumstances, we have no objection to the purchase of air purifiers if the appropriation used is otherwise available for this purpose.

for 
Comptroller General
of the United States