

## NATION

## Federal workplaces opened to AIDS walkathon appeal

Charities usually barred from on-the-job soliciting

By Ruth Larson  
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Federal employees are being asked while at work to participate in or contribute to an AIDS walkathon, thanks to a waiver of restrictions on workplace fund raising urged by the White House AIDS policy office.

Organizers of AIDSwalk 94, scheduled for Sept. 24 in the District, have been allowed to solicit donations from all federal agencies during work hours for the entire month of August.

But several other major health charities yesterday said they were not aware they could solicit government employees in the workplace.

"If it's legal and allowed, then we certainly want to consider it," said American Heart Association spokesman Joe Marx. "You may have really opened the floodgates."

Traditionally, the only charitable activity authorized for on-the-job soliciting of federal employees has been the annual Combined Federal Campaign (CFC), which is administered by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

The CFC is designed to avoid workplace disruptions by raising money for a wide range of charities during a designated period. But at the urging of the White House's office of the national AIDS policy coordinator, OPM officials made an exception.

In a June 24 letter to Kristine M. Gebbie, AIDS czar at the time, OPM Deputy Director Lorraine A. Green said: "Since your request is limited to the month of August and will therefore not conflict with the CFC [which begins in September], I am granting approval for federal employees to solicit pledges in support of this most worthy cause."

"We were very honored to get this waiver," AIDSwalk Director

John B. Miles said. "It has opened a tremendous number of doors for us, and we've seen an extraordinary amount of support from federal agencies."

AIDSwalk aims to promote awareness of AIDS and the human immunodeficiency virus, which causes the disease, and to raise \$1.7 million for area AIDS services, education and research at the Whitman Walker Clinic and 25 other organizations.

President Clinton, first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, Vice President Al Gore and his wife, Tipper, are honorary co-chairmen of the march.

Employees from 36 federal agencies, including all Cabinet departments, have signed up to participate in the walk. Participants from some agencies plan to march in groups under the agency's banner, Mr. Miles said.

He said Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and Transportation Secretary Federico Pena are expected to march, and the Labor Department team will be led by an assistant labor secretary.

In a letter to OPM workers, agency AIDSwalk coordinators wrote: "We will be asking you to either volunteer as a walker and solicit pledges, or make a pledge to co-workers who will be participating in the September event."

At least one OPM employee took offense at the on-the-job requests.

"The CFC was instituted to stop workplace solicitation by hundreds of small and large charities. Why is this group so special?" the employee said in a letter to The Washington Times.

"We don't want there to be any bad feelings over this," Mr. Miles said. "We know we're not the only charity out there, but as an event we are not part of the CFC."

But the Whitman Walker Clinic, which is sponsoring the walk, is participating in the upcoming CFC drive.

Victor Zonana, spokesman for the Department of Health and Human Services, said, "This is a non-story. It's not the least bit out of the ordinary."

Waivers have been granted for Red Cross blood drives, the D.C. Law Enforcement Torch Run and relief operations for children in Rwanda, he said.

Gerri Mason Hall, OPM counsel for extragovernmental affairs, said she receives fewer than 10 "special solicitation" requests a year, and most are approved by the OPM director unless they conflict with the CFC.

Most of the special solicitation requests are for events involving walks or footraces, she said. For example, OPM previously approved the Race for the Cure, an event to raise money for breast cancer research.

Ms. Hall said most major charities are aware of the special solicitation option and have chosen to continue raising money through the CFC.

But Jane Calvert, the American Cancer Society's fund-raising market director, said her agency has never solicited in the federal workplace because of regulations against it.

"This must be something new," she said. "We were aware such a possibility was under discussion, but I did not know we could do this. We would certainly consider it. Federal employees represent a great opportunity for us."

Her group solicits private employers as part of the national Making Strides walkathons.

Barbara Lett Simmons, president of the American Lung Association of D.C., said her agency has not solicited federal workers directly.

"We're seeking the opportunity to go into lunchrooms and cafeterias and tell workers about our programs," she said. "This is a matter of life-and-death urgency."