

Can we charge worker a fee for lost paychecks?

Q. One of our employees is constantly misplacing things, like his W-2 forms and his checks. It's getting annoying. Can we make him pay a fee? We're thinking this might make him more careful. — D.L., Iowa

A. Employers can certainly take measures to encourage employees to be more careful, but be careful how you do that. Many states have laws that prohibit employers from making any unauthorized deductions from an employee's paycheck without first receiving the employee's express, written approval for such a deduction. Check the state law and regulations on wage payments. *(Find details on state wage laws, plus links to state labor department sites at www.dol.gov/whd/state/state.htm.)*

If you insist the employee reimburse the company, request that the employee write you a check for the appropriate amount instead of deducting that amount from his paycheck. But first consider whether your response may be overkill. Could it be an unnecessarily harsh measure that won't do much to solve the problem, given the low cost of reissuance and damage to morale? If your answer is "yes," or even "maybe," you should reconsider.

A better solution may be to have someone meet with this individual and explain the administrative resources that go into the frequent reissuance of his checks and counsel him on keeping track of his documents.