

Franklin County Fire Chiefs Standard Operating Guideline		
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SOG Title: Social Media		
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PURPOSE & DISCUSSION:

To provide guidance relative to the use of and implications of information based technologies. Fire departments have found themselves thrust into an ever-advancing computer and information technology age that has operationally assisted fire service organizations in improving their communications capabilities and created a learning curve for management and staff that seems to never end. It seems that each time a new technology is learned and implemented the next advancement is right around the corner.

If the technology related only to communications necessary for conducting official business and computer systems were used strictly for official business, the development of policies to govern use of the technology would be simple.

However, this new technology has stretched to all aspects of public, business and personal life and the personal non-business use seems to frequently relate back to the employer and the industry the person works in. With most employees and volunteers using cellular phones, taking digital pictures, surfing the Internet and participating in blogs and on social media sites, fire districts and fire departments are feeling increasing pressure to develop policies to address the use of the social media aspects of information use. Policies need to be developed that address the use of these and other forms of social media.

Purely personal use and content that occurs outside of the workplace that does not integrate materials obtained from work can be ignored. However, when the use relates back to the duties and materials available in the workplace, policies are necessary to instruct personnel on what is and is not acceptable.

While a fire department will not be able to control all off duty use of this technology, they are able to regulate how their equipment and materials are used and identify who will speak for the organization and who cannot. The organization will need to be prepared to disassociate itself from the actions of an employee or volunteer that acts offensively or contrary to the mission of the organization, even if regulatory or disciplinary action can be taken based upon a person's actions or the content of their speech.

SCOPE:

This procedure will apply to all department members and will be the foundational document that provides guidance relative to the use of social media.

PROCEDURES:**SOCIAL MEDIA CODE OF CONDUCT:**

1. A social media code of conduct shall be adhered to by all Fire Department members:
 - 1.1 When engaging in social media or social networking activities, all personnel will maintain a level of professionalism both on-duty and off-duty that is consistent with the honorable mission of our fire department.
 - 1.2 The publication of any statement, comment, imagery, or information through any medium of communication which is potentially adverse to the operation, morale, or efficiency of the department is prohibited and subject to disciplinary action.
 - 1.3 Members are prohibited from using Fire Department owned digital images, audio, or video unless authorized by the Fire Chief.
 - 1.4 Members are prohibited from using / viewing sexually explicit or illegal material while at department facilities, on department apparatus, on department owned technology.
 - 1.5 Members are prohibited from conduct that may bring discredit upon the department or members of the department.
 - 1.6 Any images, video or audio recordings taken on personally owned technology while responding to or operating at an incident scene are owned by the department. Any such images are public record and must be transferred to the incident commander.
 - 1.7 Images, video or audio files may be taken on personal technology for the purpose of enhancing patient care or documenting the cause and origin of a fire. Such electronic media are to be turned over to the appropriate officer and shall be retained as part of the investigation or incident report.
2. No member, while speaking as a **private citizen** on a **matter of public concern** regarding the Fire Department, shall speak in such a way as to cause actual harm or disruption to the operations of the department.
3. Members of the fire department may speak on a **matter of public concern** as a **spokesperson** for the department only with permission through the chain of command.
4. The use of titles, Fire Department logos, and Fire Department owned images or identification that is contrary to the Department's/City's/Town's/District's code of conduct is prohibited. Furthermore, the use of titles, Fire Department logos, and Fire Department

owned images or identification that creates an impression in any way that the member is a spokesperson for the Fire Department is prohibited unless authorized by the Fire Chief.

5. Members are prohibited from publically discussing fire department matters that are not of a public concern unless doing so is with other employees and/or employee representatives of a collective bargaining unit(s), and is for the purpose of **engaging in concerted activities** relative to workplace issues.
6. Members shall not engage in speech that is **false, deceptive, libelous, slanderous, misleading or causes harm** to others (including speech that constitutes **hate speech or harassment**). Members shall not discuss protected or confidential matters of the department including, but not limited to :
 - 6.1 Matters that are under investigation, or
 - 6.2 Patient and employee information protected by HIPAA/medical confidentiality laws, or
 - 6.3 Personnel matters that are protected from disclosure by law, or
 - 6.4 Sensitive information specific to an incident that would potentially embarrass those members of the public or Department / City/Town/District members involved or present.
7. Members are prohibited from participating in video chat or video chat rooms in uniform or any other means that identifies them as a member of the Fire Department whether on duty or off duty unless authorized by the Fire Chief.

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES:

The fire department acknowledges that use of technology by emergency service organizations provides several useful benefits including training and the acquisition of useful information for the betterment of the organization and its members. It also allows for the dissemination of information to the public for recruitment, safety education and public relations purposes. As such, the department embraces the usage of instant technology to that end.

Members and employees must follow the following guidelines when discussing the department on Social Media Websites:

- Do not make any disparaging or false statements or use profane language.
- Do not make any statements or other forms of speech that ridicule, malign, disparage or otherwise express bias against any race, religion or protected class of individual.
- Make clear that you are expressing your personal opinion and not that of the department.
- Do not share confidential or proprietary information.
- Do not violate department policies including the Code of Ethics.
- Do not display department logos, uniforms or similar identifying items without prior written permission.

- Do not post personal photographs or provide similar means of personal recognition that may cause you to be identified as a firefighter, officer or employee of the department without prior written permission.
- Do not publish any materials that could reasonably be considered to represent the views or positions of the department without authorization.

The department owns the right to all data and files in any department-owned computer, network, cell phone or other information system. The department also reserves the right to monitor electronic mail messages (including personal/private/instant messaging systems) and their content, sent from department owned technology as well as any and all use of the Internet and of computer equipment used to create, view, or access e-mail and Internet content. Members and employees must be aware that the electronic messages sent and received using Fire Department equipment are not private and are subject to viewing, downloading, inspection, release, and archiving by district and department officers at all times. The department has the right to inspect any and all files stored in private areas of the network or on department computers or storage media in order to assure compliance with policy as well as state and federal laws.

Inappropriate use of the Internet and instant technology while on department business may result in disciplinary actions, up to and including termination as an employee of the department. Fire Department computer equipment is to be used for fire district/department business and purposes in a professional and businesslike manner.