

DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDER 12-01

OFFICE of the CHIEF OF POLICE

DATE: February 1, 2012

PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

I. PURPOSE.

The personal use of social media can have a bearing on departmental personnel in their official capacity. As such, this policy provides information of a precautionary nature as well as prohibitions on the use of social media by department personnel.

II. DEFINITION.

Social Media: A category of Internet-based resources that integrate user-generated content and user participation. This includes, but is not limited to, social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace), microblogging sites (Twitter, Nixle), photo- and video-sharing sites (Flickr, YouTube), wikis (Wikipedia), blogs, and news sites (Digg, Reddit).

III. GENERAL

Precautions and Prohibitions -- Department personnel shall abide by the following when using social media.

1. Personnel are free to express themselves as private citizens on social media sites to the degree that their speech does not impair working relationships of this department, impede the performance of duties, impair discipline and harmony among coworkers, or negatively affect the public perception of the department.
2. As public employees, personnel are cautioned that speech on- or off-duty, made pursuant to their official duties -- that is, that owes its existence to the employee's professional duties and responsibilities -- is not protected speech under the First Amendment and may form the basis for discipline if deemed detrimental to the department. Personnel should assume that their speech and related activity on social media sites will reflect upon their office and this department.

3. Personnel shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any information to which they have access as a result of their employment without written permission from the Chief or his or her designee.

4. Personnel are prohibited from:

a. Speech containing obscene or sexually explicit language, images, or acts and statements or other forms of speech that ridicule, malign, disparage, or otherwise express bias against any race, any religion, or any protected class of individuals.

b. Speech involving themselves or other department personnel reflecting behavior that would reasonably be considered reckless or irresponsible.

c. Displaying department logos, uniforms, or similar identifying items on personal web pages.

d. Posting personal photographs or provide similar means of personal recognition that may cause them to be identified as a police officer of this department.

e. Divulging information gained by reason of their authority; make any statements, speeches, appearances, and endorsements; or publish materials that could reasonably be considered to represent the views or positions of this department without express authorization.

5. Department personnel should be aware that privacy settings and social media sites are constantly in flux, and they should never assume that personal information posted on such sites is protected.

6. Department personnel should expect that any information created, transmitted, downloaded, exchanged, or discussed in a public online forum may be accessed by the department at any time without prior notice.

7. Reporting violations -- Any employee becoming aware of or having knowledge of a posting or of any website or web page in violation of the provision of this policy shall notify his or her supervisor immediately for follow-up action.

BY ORDER OF:

THOMAS J. BYRNE
Chief of Police