

**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
FIRE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

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**BULLETIN NO. 33**

**December 2013**

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**SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

**I. POLICY**

The District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department (“Department”) understands that social media can be a fun and rewarding way to share your life and opinions. However, use of social media also presents certain risks and carries with it certain responsibilities. To assist you in making responsible decisions about your use of social media, the Department has established these standards for appropriate use of social media. This includes the establishment of rules regarding the appropriate usage of electronic devices while engaged in official departmental activities.

This policy applies to all employees who work for the Department.

**II. STANDARDS**

In the rapidly expanding world of electronic communication, *social media* can mean many things. *Social media* includes all means of communicating or posting information or content of any sort on the Internet, including to your own or someone else's web log or blog, journal or diary, personal web site, social networking or affinity web site, web bulletin board or a chat room, whether or not associated or affiliated with the Department, as well as any other form of electronic communication that might reasonably become public.

The Department further understands that the use of technology items has grown quite considerably over the past few years, and many employees and their families consider their electronic communication, photography and recording devices to be a daily life necessity. The Department also recognizes that these devices — when used inappropriately by employees — can place the employees and the Department in dangerous territory regarding the electronic communication of confidential, privileged or private information and/or the communication of content expressly prohibited in the work place.

Most electronic communication activities are governed by many of the same principles and guidelines embodied in long-standing policies of both the Department and the District. Ultimately, you are solely responsible for your electronic communications. Before creating electronic content, consider some of the risks and rewards that are involved. Bear in mind that any of your conduct that adversely affects your job performance, the performance of fellow employees — or otherwise adversely affects D.C. residents, visitors to the District, vendors, people who work on behalf of the District of Columbia or the Department, or the Department’s legitimate business interests, or the public’s confidence in the Department — may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

**A. KNOW AND FOLLOW THE RULES**

Carefully read / review this policy along with the following guidelines, and ensure that your electronic communications are consistent with Department policies, including but not limited to, the following:

1. District of Columbia Ethics Policy;
2. DCFEMS Information Policy;
3. DCFEMS Memo 2012-115 — Zero Tolerance Policy;
4. DCFEMS Bulletin 24 — Anti-Hazing Policy;
5. DCFEMS Bulletin 26 — Equal Employment Opportunity; and
6. DCFEMS Bulletin 27 — Sexual Harassment.

Inappropriate electronic communication that may include discriminatory remarks, harassment, retaliation, sexual innuendo, threats of violence, or similarly inappropriate or unlawful content will not be tolerated and may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

**B. BE RESPECTFUL**

Always be fair and courteous to fellow employees, residents and visitors of the District, vendors, or people who work on behalf of the District. Also, keep in mind that you are more likely to resolve work-related complaints by speaking directly with your co-workers or your immediate supervisor, rather than by posting complaints to a social media outlet. Nevertheless, if you decide to post complaints or criticism, avoid using statements, photographs, video or audio that reasonably could be viewed as malicious, obscene, threatening or intimidating, or as disparaging to customers, members, employees, or suppliers, or that might constitute harassment or bullying, even if it is done after work hours, on a personal electronic device, or from home. Examples of such conduct might include offensive posts meant to intentionally harm someone's reputation or posts that could contribute to a hostile work environment on the basis of race, sex, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or any other status protected by federal law, District law, or Department policy.

**C. BE HONEST AND ACCURATE**

Make sure you are always honest and accurate when posting information or news, and if you make a mistake, correct it quickly. Be open about any previous posts you have altered. Remember that the Internet archives almost everything; therefore, even deleted postings can be searched. Never post any information or rumors that you know or should know to be false or misleading about the Department, fellow employees, members, residents or visitors of the District, vendors, or people working on behalf of District.

**D. DO NOT POST STATEMENTS, PHOTOGRAPHS, VIDEO OR AUDIO THAT COULD BE VIEWED AS MALICIOUS, OBSCENE, THREATENING, INTIMIDATING, DISPARAGING, BULLYING, OR HARASSING.**

1. Express only your personal opinions. Never represent yourself as a spokesperson for the Department. If the Department is a subject of the content you are creating, make it clear that your views do not represent those of the Department, fellow employees, members, District residents, and visitors to the District, vendors, suppliers or people working on behalf of the District. If you do publish a blog or post online related to the work you do or related to subjects associated with the Department, make it clear that you are not speaking on behalf of the Department or the District. It is best to include a disclaimer such as "The postings on this site are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the government of the District of Columbia or the D.C.Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department."
2. Maintain the confidentiality of the Department's private or confidential information. Private or confidential information may include personnel information of District government employees, communications with government attorneys, private health information of employees and citizens served by the Department, information regarding juveniles, etc... Do not post — or, otherwise, make publicly available — internal reports, policies, procedures or other internal business-related communications that are confidential, privileged or protected from public disclosure.

**E. USING SOCIAL MEDIA AT WORK**

Employees should refrain from using social media while on duty and while operating Department equipment, unless it is work-related as authorized by your manager or consistent with Department policy, District policy, or District law. Employees should understand that the use of District electronic equipment may be monitored. Do not use your District email address to register on social networks, blogs or other online tools utilized for personal electronic communications.

**F. USING PERSONAL CELLPHONES, CAMERAS AND RECORDING TECHNOLOGY AT WORK**

This policy shall directly apply to personally owned cellular telephones or communication devices with cellular telephone capabilities and any device that can photograph or capture or record still images, video or sound or any combination of the above. Employees shall not directly or indirectly:

1. Post or transmit the following types of information:
  - a. Pictures, depictions, descriptions, or personal information of any victim, patient, or customer;
  - b. Pictures, depictions or description of any crime, fire, or accident scene; or

- c. Information involving previous, current, or future fire investigations.
  2. Photograph, video record, or audio record the following:
    - a. Depictions, descriptions, or personal information of any victim, patient, or customer;
    - b. Depictions or descriptions of any crime, fire, or accident scene;
    - c. Depictions or descriptions of any member performing his or her official duties; or
    - d. Official Department business, meetings, or activities involving confidential or classified data, or information impacting the security and welfare of the District or its residents or visitors.
  3. Release to any other individual, group, organization, online social network, non-Department website or media outlet— this includes distribution among Department employees or among neighboring fire / emergency organizations any photographs, still images, video or audio recording of official Department activities.
  4. Post images of any other Department employee or official Department activities on their personal social media pages (including, but not limited to, MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter). However, employees may reference their own membership in the Department, or their vocation as a Fire & EMS provider. **Employees who reference their membership or employment with the Department shall include a disclaimer that the opinion s/he posts are personal and not the opinion of the Department or the District of Columbia government.**
  5. Post, transmit, or otherwise distribute any information to which they have access as a result of their employment.

## G. REPORTING VIOLATIONS

Any employee becoming aware of or having knowledge of any posting, website, or webpage that violates this policy shall immediately notify his or her supervisor and provide a special report.

## H. SAFETY AND SECURITY ISSUES

Employees are cautioned to be mindful of potential safety and security issues they may encounter when identifying themselves as an employee of the Department when participating in social media including, but not limited to:

1. Disclosing home address, phone number(s), and other personally identifiable information;

2. Transmitting or posting pictures or depictions of any Fire & EMS issued uniform or any part of a Fire & EMS uniform including personally purchased items which reference or resemble any Fire & EMS badge, patch, logo or issued uniform or equipment; or
3. Transmitting or posting pictures or depictions of any issued Department equipment including vehicles.

#### **I. RETALIATION IS PROHIBITED**

The Department prohibits taking negative action against any employee for reporting a possible deviation from this policy or for cooperating in an investigation. Any employee who retaliates against another employee for reporting — or for cooperating in an investigation of — a possible deviation from this policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

#### **J. EXCEPTIONS**

This policy does not prohibit employees from the following:

1. Reporting violations or concerns under the District Whistleblower Protection Act. Information can be found at <http://dchr.dc.gov/page/whistleblower-protections-and-obligations>.
2. Reporting waste, fraud, and abuse. Information can be found at <http://oig.dc.gov/services/suggest.shtm>.
3. Disclosing or discussing information regarding terms and conditions of employment.
4. Notwithstanding any other provision of *this policy*, an employee is not prohibited from posting to social media if: (a) he or she is not on duty; (b) it is clear that he or she is expressing a personal viewpoint and not that of the Department; (c) he or she does not appear in a Department uniform or clothing with a Department logo or insignia or the posting cannot otherwise be associated with the Department by use of its name, logo, insignia, or other identifying marks; (d) he or she does not post any information or material which was received as a result of his or her employment; and (e) he or she does not violate any District of Columbia law. Violations of Department policy including, but not limited to those referenced in Section A, may still result in discipline or termination. Nothing in this policy abrogates or alters those prior existing policies.
5. Notwithstanding any other provision of this policy, an employee shall not be prohibited from exercising his or her First Amendment Rights.

**K. MEDIA CONTACTS**

Employees should not speak to the media on the Department's behalf without contacting the Public Information Office (202-673-3331). All media inquiries should be directed to them.

**L. FOR MORE INFORMATION**

If you have questions or need further guidance, please contact the Department's Public Information Office (202-673-3331).