

2012-118 Social Media Policy



Westbrook Fire and Rescue Department

Standard Operating Procedure

Section: Administrative

TOPIC: Social Media Policy

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POLICY REFERENCES:

APPROVED BY:

Chief of Department
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Purpose:

To state The Westbrook Fire & Rescue Department's position on the utility of social media, by both personnel and volunteers, and provides guidance on management techniques. This includes both personal and professional usage.

Scope:

The Westbrook Fire & Rescue Department (WFRD) endorses the secure use of social media channels to enhance communication, collaboration, and information exchange; streamline processes; and foster productivity.

Policy:

This policy is not meant to address one social media channel, but social media in general, to be inclusive of advanced technology and tools.

Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

- * Blog: A self-published diary or commentary on a particular topic that may allow visitors to post responses, reactions, or comments. The term is short for "Web Log".
- * Page: The specific portion of a Social Media website where content is displayed and managed by an individual or individuals with administrator rights.
- * Post: Content an individual shares on a Social Media site or the act of publishing content on a site. * Profile; Information that a user provides about himself or herself on a social networking site.
- * Social media: A category of Internet-based resources that integrate user-generated content and outside participation. Including, but is not limited to, social- networking sites (Facebook, MySpace), micro-blogging sites (Twitter, Nixle), photo and video sharing sites (Flickr, YouTube), wikis (Wikipedia), blogs, message boards, and news sites (Digg, Reddit).
- * Social Networks: Online platforms where users can create profiles, share information, and socialize with others using technology such as laptops, cellphones, and tablets.
- * Speech: Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken word, written language, expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, videotape, or related forms of communication.

* Web 2.0: The second generation of the World Wide Web focused on sharable, user-generated content, rather than static web pages. Some use this term interchangeably with Social Media.

* Wiki: Web pages that can be edited collaboratively by anyone at any time.

Discussion

The decision to utilize Social Media is a business decision, not a technology based decision. WFRD has an overriding interest in determining what is "spoken" on behalf of the WFRD on Social Media web sites. The goal of the WFRD is to use Social Media web sites with effective and appropriate information, security, and private controls. The WFRD expects all employees, speaking on behalf of the WFRD, actively participating on any Social Media web page to understand and follow these guidelines. These guidelines will evolve as new technologies and Social Media tools emerge.

Policy

Social Media provides a new and potentially valuable means of assisting the WFRD, and its personnel in expanding community outreach, problem-solving, fire prevention, and related objectives. This policy identifies potential uses that may be explored or expanded upon as deemed reasonable by administrative and supervisory personnel. The WFRD also recognizes the role that these tools play in the personal lives of some departmental personnel. The personal use of Social Media can have bearing on WFRD personnel in their official capacity. As such, this policy provides information of a precautionary nature as well as prohibitions on the personal use of Social Media by WFRD personnel.

WFRD Sites

WFRD Sites shall include the use or creation of all WFRD Social Media sites or pages shall be approved by the Fire Chief or their designee, and shall be administered as determined by the Chief.

All Social Media or WFRD Sites shall indicate that they are maintained by the WFRD and shall have contact information for the WFRD prominently displayed to the highest degree possible.

Social Media and all WFRD Sites should include an introductory statement that clearly specifies the purpose and scope of the agency's presence on the website, if possible. The page should also link to the WFRD's official website, if possible, and should be designed with the target audience in mind (i.e. youth, potential firefighter recruits, etc).

Social Media content on WFRD Sites shall adhere to applicable laws, regulations, and policies, including all information technology and records management policies. Information contained on these sites is subject to the public records laws, and relevant records retention schedules apply to their content. All content must be managed, stored and retrieved to comply with open records laws and e-discovery laws and policies.

Social Media and WFRD Sites should state that the opinions expressed by visitors to the pages do not reflect the opinions or views of the WFRD. Pages should clearly indicate that posted comments will be monitored and that the WFRD reserves the right to remove obscenities, off-topic comments, and personal attacks. Pages shall also indicate that any content posted or submitted for posting is subject to public disclosure.

Personnel designated to represent the department on social media outlets shall conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the department. Accordingly, all department standards of conduct apply to their sites and personnel shall observe conventionally accepted protocols and proper decorum in their activities on these sites. All postings will be factual, accurate, complete and within their area of expertise.

Personnel representing the department shall not make statements about victims or the guilt or innocence of any suspect or arrestee for whom they provided care. Personnel shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate confidential information, including photographs or videos, related to department training, activities, or work-related assignments without express written consent. Employees shall not conduct political activities or private business on department sites or pages.

WFRD social media sites may be subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Any content maintained on

social media that is related to departmental business, including a list of subscribers, posted communications, and communications submitted for posting, may be public record subject to public disclosure. Additionally, all contents on WFRD social media sites could be subpoenaed into court. Employees must keep this in mind when posting to WFRD social media sites.

Employees of the WFRD shall not share personal information about himself or herself, or any other WFRD employee on any WFRD sanctioned social media web site.

The use of department computers by personnel to access social media is prohibited without authorization. The use of personally owned devices or computers to manage the department's social media activities or in the course of official duties is prohibited without authorization.

Employees shall observe and abide by all copyright, trademark, and service mark restrictions in posting materials to electronic media.

WFRD sections or units with sanctioned social media web sites shall monitor their sites for posts requesting responses from citizens and for comments in violation of this policy.

Potential Uses of Social Media

The potential uses of social media are limited only by our imagination. Department members with ideas for potential uses of social media should submit them to their chain of command via interoffice memo for approval through the Fire Chief.

Social media may prove to be valuable to the department as an investigative tool when seeking evidence or information about:

- Arsons
- Code violations
- Problem properties
- Potential fire hazards
- Abandoned buildings

Social media also may be used for community outreach and engagement by:

- * Fire prevention tips
- * Offering online-reporting opportunities
- * Fireworks laws
- * Fire class days / permitting

Social media may serve as an additional resource to release time-sensitive notifications related to:

- * Road closures
- * Special events
- * Weather emergencies
- * Missing or endangered persons

Social media can be a powerful recruiting tool, as many use the Internet to search for employment or volunteer opportunities. Department members are encouraged to use social media channels to assist with recruiting potential candidates for employment or volunteer positions within the department.

Public Posting/Commenting Policy

As a public entity, the WFRD must abide by certain standards to serve all constituents in a civil and unbiased manner. Posts or comments on a departmental sanctioned social media site containing any of the following forms of content are considered inappropriate and shall not be permitted. All will be subject to removal by the Chief or his/her designee:

- Posts that are not directly related to the WFRD or the City of Westbrook.
- Comments not related to the original topic, including random or unintelligible comments.
- Any posts not factual or that are inaccurate.
- Posts that do not promote civil discussion.
- Profane, obscene, or pornographic content and/or language.
- Content that could compromise an ongoing investigation.
- Any personal, identifying information of a person.
- Defamatory or personal attacks.
- Threats to any person or organization.
- Posts/comments in support of, or in opposition to, any federal or state political campaigns or ballot measures.
- Solicitation of commerce, including, but not limited to, advertising of any business or product.
- Conduct in violation of any federal, state, or local law.
- Encouragement of illegal activity.
- Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public and/or public systems.
- Content that violates a legal ownership interest, such as a copyright or trademark of any party.

A comment posted by a member of the public on any WFRD social media web site is the sole opinion of the commentator or poster only. Publication of a comment does not imply endorsement or agreement by the WFRD, nor do such comments reflect the opinions or policies of the WFRD.

The WFRD reserves the right to deny access to WFRD social media web sites to any individual who violates the WFRD's social media policy, at any time, without notice.

Complaints against employees should never be reported on any WFRD social media site. If a complaint is received via social media, the complaint will be handled according to existing WFRD complaint procedures. If any complaints are received via social media postings (naming an individual) that complaint will be removed. It will be the responsibility of the moderator to remove the post and note the name of the individual that made the complaint. This name will be included in with the complaint at the time it is forwarded to the Chief. At this time, the moderator will submit a new entry that tells the individual and other followers that the post was removed because an employee was named, but that an internal review has been initiated.

Private use of Social Media by Employees

The department recognizes the growing use of social media by its employees as well as its implications on business conducted by the department. As a result of the unique nature of the firefighting profession, the department has an obligation to enact rules regarding the private use of social media by employees.

Absent controlling legislation, department employees shall abide by the following precautions and prohibitions when participating in social media:

- WFRD 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, for which loyalty and confidentiality are important, impede the performance of duties, impair discipline and harmony among coworkers, or negatively affect the public perception of the department
- As public employees, WFRD personnel are cautioned that speech on or off duty made pursuant to their official duties - that owes its existence to the employee's professional duties and responsibilities - is not protected speech under the First Amendment and, therefore, may be disciplined if deemed detrimental to the department. Department personnel should assume that their speech and related activity on social media

sites will reflect upon their office and this department

- Personnel shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any information, including
 - photographs or videos, to which they have access as a result of their employment, without written approval from the Fire Chief or their designee
 - For safety and security reasons, Personnel should use caution in disclosing their employment with this department. This includes posting personal photographs that identify themselves as members of the Department.
 - Personnel shall not post information pertaining to any other department member without their expressed permission
 - Personnel shall not display department logos, uniforms, or similar identifying items on personal pages, in any manner, that could bring discredit upon the Department

When using social media, department personnel should be mindful that their speech becomes part of the worldwide electronic domain. Therefore, adherence to the department's code of conduct is required in the personal use of social media. The following acts are deemed inappropriate and are prohibited for personnel.

- Speech containing obscene or sexually explicit language.
- Images, acts, statements, or any other forms of speech that ridicule, malign, disparage, or otherwise express bias against any race, any religion, or any protected class of individuals
- Speech involving themselves or other WFRD personnel reflecting behavior that would be considered reckless or irresponsible.

Engaging in prohibited speech noted herein may provide grounds for undermining or impeaching an employee's testimony in a court proceeding. Department personnel thus sanctioned are subject to discipline up to and including termination.

Department personnel may not divulge information gained by reason of their position with this agency, make any statements, speeches, appearances or endorsements, or publish materials that could reasonably be considered to represent the views or positions of this department without express authorization.

Department personnel should be aware that they may be subject to civil litigation for:

- * Publishing or posting false information that harms the reputation of another person, group, or organization (defamation)
- * Publishing or posting private facts and personal information about someone without their permission, that has not been previously revealed to the public, is not of legitimate public concern, and would be offensive to a reasonable person
- * Using someone else's name, likeness, or other personal attributes without that person's permission for an exploitive purpose
- * Publishing the creative work of another, trademarks, or certain confidential business information without permission of the owner

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.

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.

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.

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- Solicitation of commerce, including, but not limited to, advertising of any business or product.
- Conduct in violation of any federal, state, or local law.
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