

TAKOMA PARK POLICE DEPARTMENT - GENERAL ORDERS



TITLE: Social Media	Number: 418	
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Authority: Chief Antonio DeVaul	Updated: January 31, 2023	Total Pages 6

I. Purpose

The department acknowledges the value of social media platforms and endorses the official business use of social media to facilitate communication and timely information exchange. This directive addresses management responsibilities for the department's social networking accounts; and establishes parameters for on-duty official and off-duty personal use of social networking tools. It is not the purpose of this directive to address any particular form of social media; rather, it is applicable to social media in general because technological advances and changing sociological need will surely result in a continuing emergence of new tools.

II. Policy

The department recognizes that social media provides potentially valuable means to achieve community outreach, problem-solving, investigative, crime prevention, and related objectives. In that capacity, the department will use social media tools. The department also recognizes the role that these tools play in the personal lives of some department employees; and that personal use of social media can have a bearing on departmental personnel in their official capacity. As such, this directive provides information of a precautionary nature as well as prohibitions on the use of social media by department personnel. It is the policy of this agency that no employee will communicate on any social media platform any message (by words, images, symbols, or other means) that could be reasonably interpreted as conduct unbecoming and which negatively impacts the operation of the Agency or City.

III. Definitions:

- A. 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."
- B. Page: The specific portion of a social media website where content is displayed and managed by an individual or individuals with administrator rights.
- C. Podcast: A podcast (or non-streamed webcast) is a series of digital media files (either audio or video) that are released episodically.
- D. Post: Content an individual share on a social media site or the act of publishing content on a site.

- E. Profile: Information that a user provides about himself or herself on a social networking site or web page.
- F. 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, SnapChat, Instagram), micro-blogging sites (Twitter, Nixle), photo-sharing and video-sharing sites (Flickr, YouTube), wikis (Wikipedia), blogs, and news sites (Digg, Reddit).
- G. Social Networks: Online platforms where users can create profiles, share information, and socialize with others using a range of technologies.
- H. Speech: Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, videotape, or related forms of communication. Web 2.0: The second generation of the World Wide Web focused on shareable, user-generated content, rather than static web pages. Some use this term interchangeably with social media.
- I. Wiki: Web page(s) that can be edited collaboratively.

IV. **On-The-Job Use:**

The use of mainstream social networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter can be very useful to the department as a means of communicating with the public in a modern forum. These tools can provide the public with convenient and timely access to information, such as: awareness of crime within the community; assistance to ongoing investigations; identifying and locating fugitives; recent and upcoming department activities; and recruitment and employment opportunities.

- A. Management of Networking Accounts: The department's social networking accounts are supported by the City's Information System (Tech Support) staff. The Public Information Officer (PIO) in the Office of the Chief of Police has primary responsibility for maintenance of the content on, or distributed through, the sites. The PIO will rely heavily on CID, patrol and communications personnel to contribute timely and fresh information for distribution. This may require postings to be made within minutes of an incident occurring, such as for ongoing dangers within the community, critical missing persons, or major traffic disruptions. The PIO also will have primary responsibility for reviewing the content of information posted or contributed by the public to ensure the information is not inappropriate or offensive to other readers.
- B. Authorization of Postings: The Chief of Police or designee will maintain the authority to determine what postings are distributed through various social networking sites and its duration.
- C. Removal of Postings and Associations: As a networking tool, social networking

accounts have the tremendous benefit of being able to provide feedback from the community on the postings created by the department. This ability provides for not only positive, but also negative feedback.

1. As the manager of the accounts, the PIO shall review postings or remarks made by residents or non-residents as well as the people associating themselves with the department. The PIO will ensure the feedback posted by the community reflects the values of the department and ensure there is no offensive language or other inappropriate content, which would reflect negatively on the department.
 2. The PIO will also review the associations made, commonly referred to as “followers” or “fans,” to ensure the associations do not bring discredit to the department.
 3. If offensive material or postings are discovered, they immediately will be removed from the account’s postings by the PIO. If an association is made or attempted which would bring discredit to the department, the PIO will take steps to promptly remove the association. The PIO will alert the Chief of Police or designee of the discovery and removal.
 4. The PIO will provide the public with disclaimers making them aware that the department does not condone any offensive postings made by the public and reserves the right to remove any postings or associations.
 5. If a parent or legal guardian makes a request to have a missing person flyer and/or photos and information removed from social media for their juvenile child, who has returned, safe or otherwise, the PIO, at the approval of the Chief, will remove such flyer, photo and/or information from the police social media accounts.
- D. Employee Responsibilities: During duty hours, employees shall not access social networking sites for personal use on any City owned or Agency issued devices. Officers will give their full time and attention to agency related duties and tasks during on-duty hours. On-duty access to social media sites will be limited to official business purposes, such as conducting investigations, monitoring an ongoing public safety issue, or for PIO purposes.

V. Off-Duty Personal Use:

When off duty, employees who access or use social networking sites for personal use shall comply with the dictates of this Order and all other orders, rules and regulations of the department. For purposes of this Order, social networking sites are those that use Internet services to allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within the system and include comments posted on the sites. The type and design of network varies from site to site. Examples of Internet-based social networking sites include blogs, photo-sharing, video-sharing, micro-blogging, social networking, and podcasts. The absence of, or lack of explicit reference to, a specific site does not limit

the extent of the application of this Order.

- A. Employees may identify themselves as members of the department on social networking sites. If they do, however, their postings and actions may be considered reflective of the department.
- B. Regardless of duty status, employees will not post, transmit or endorse any information contained on any social network, social media platform, website, or any other internet site when such activity will have a direct or indirect negative impact on the City, the Agency, or its members. Employees must remember that any information transmitted electronically is subject to interception and they must act or refrain from acting in due consideration thereof. For example, comments made by an employee on a social networking site could be used by an attorney to attack or impeach the employee as a witness in court and this in turn could have an adverse effect on the employee's continuing employment with the department.
- C. Employees will honor the privacy rights of other current or former employees by seeking their permission before writing about or displaying internal department events that could be considered a breach of their privacy and confidentiality. Employees at all times shall comply with the law in regard to copyright/plagiarism. Posting of someone else's work without permission is not allowed (other than short quotes that comply with the "fair use" exceptions). Other relevant laws with which employees must comply include those related to libel and defamation of character.
- D. Employees must recognize that they are legally liable for anything they write or present online. Employees can be disciplined and/or sued for negative commentary, content, or images that are defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous, or that can create a hostile work environment. Employees are prohibited from posting or endorsing any information on social media that can be construed as hateful, disrespectful, or racist. The following are examples of posts that may not be protected speech and may be the subject of a disciplinary action.
 - 1. Discourteous or disrespectful regarding another person's ethnicity, race, religion, gender, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, and/or disability.
 - 2. A pattern of behavior which constitutes harassment or contains threats against another person.
 - 3. Slanderous, obscene, vulgar, or hateful messages.
 - 4. Comment(s) on the guilt or innocence of a suspect, or the credibility of a witness prior to adjudication of the matter for which the employee is involved in any work-related capacity.

5. Images or descriptions of Takoma Park Police uniforms, badges, patches, marked vehicles or property of any kind used for personal purposes, or in any context which would likely have an adverse effect on the reputation, integrity of the agency or that impacts the agency's mission.
 6. Sharing of personal opinions of judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, witnesses, victims, or others directly involved in judicial proceedings, especially when one's actions can be interpreted as having the intent to harass, intimidate, or coerce.
 7. Information which contains Confidential Information, or which is protected from disclosure by law, such as Social Security Information, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), or Personnel Records.
 8. The private, personal, or personnel information of a fellow employee without their consent.
 9. Using personal handles that identify their employment with TPPD or workplace such as "@TakomaPD_johndoe" or "@policeTPPD_janedoe".
 10. Links to inappropriate websites such as those that are associated with known hate groups, and/or that promote violence against others.
 11. Confidential information on past, present, or future investigations obtained as a result of one's position as a member of the agency that has not been made public to include: photographs or video recordings from crime scenes; witness or victim statements; any other sensitive public safety information/items.
 12. Political or private business while using an official City or Agency source such as one's Agency email address, or Agency letterhead, etc.
 13. Posts that violate any Federal, State, Local Law, or the Commission's MSRR, Practices, or Procedures.
- E. Employees are cautioned that photos posted on sites may be used for negative purposes, such as placement on anti-police web sites, identification of officers working undercover assignments, and accusations of misconduct by identified officers. Unless permission is granted in writing from the Chief or designee, employees are prohibited from posting photos of Takoma Park Police Department uniforms, patches, badges, logos or vehicles.
- F. Employees shall avoid using their personal devices to take photos at crime scenes. Photos taken while on duty at crime scenes or on police-related calls and events can become property of the department as evidence. Any photos taken at a crime scene shall not be posted on any social networking site or shared with anyone for

an unauthorized purpose.

- G. Employees must take care not to purposely or inadvertently disclose any information on social networking sites that is confidential or law enforcement sensitive. Without authorization of the Chief or designee, employees are prohibited from disclosing information or details concerning:
1. Criminal or traffic investigations;
 2. Administrative investigations and or actions;
 3. Official departmental training calls for service, traffic stops, vehicle crashes and other contacts with residents; and
 4. Personnel issues, including disciplinary action, transfers, assignments, etc.
- H. Any employee becoming aware or having knowledge of a posting, website, web page or e-mail that violates the provisions of this or any other Agency or City policy, procedure, or regulation will promptly notify an available supervisor.