

Administrative Policy:

Use of City of Takoma Park Email Services

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this document is to establish the acceptable use of City email services and email distribution lists. The policy aims to:

- Reduce the security and business risks faced by the City
- Inform employees about permitted uses of City email
- Ensure employees follow appropriate email etiquette
- Help the City satisfy its legal obligations regarding email use

The City of Takoma Park provides email services to its employees where relevant and useful for their jobs. This policy describes the rules governing email use at the workplace.

This policy applies to all staff, contractors and volunteers who use the City email system. It applies regardless of where that email use takes place, whether on City premises, while travelling for business, or while working from home.

EMAIL USE

Personal Use of City Email:

The City recognizes that email is an important communication tool in many people's daily lives. As such, the City allows employees to use their City email account for personal reasons, with the following stipulations:

- Personal email use should be of a reasonable level and restricted to non-work times, such as breaks and during lunch.
- All rules described in this policy apply equally to personal email use. For instance, inappropriate content is always inappropriate, no matter whether it is being sent or received for business or personal reasons.
- Personal email use must not affect the email service available to other users. For instance, sending exceptionally large files by email could slow access for other employees.

Inappropriate Email Content and Use:

The City of Takoma Park email system must not be used to send or store inappropriate content or materials. It is important that employees understand that viewing or distributing inappropriate content via email is not acceptable under any circumstances.

Inappropriate content includes but is not limited to: pornography, racial or religious slurs, gender-specific comments, information encouraging criminal activity or terrorism, or materials relating to cults, gambling and illegal drugs. This definition of inappropriate content or material also covers any text, images or other media that could reasonably offend someone on the basis of race, age, sex, religious or political beliefs, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic protected by law.

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Users must not:

- Write or send emails that might be defamatory or incur liability to the City.
- Create or distribute any inappropriate content or material via email.
- Use system address book or email lists for personal use.
- Use email for any illegal or criminal activities.
- Send offensive or harassing emails to others.
- Send messages or material that could damage the City's image, brand or reputation.
- Send messages or material that gives the impression that the City supports a particular position, candidate or action that the City Council has not expressly acted on.

Any user who receives an email they consider to be inappropriate should report this to their immediate supervisor.

Monitoring Email Use:

The City's system and software are provided for legitimate business use. The City therefore reserves the right to monitor employee use of email, whether for City or personal use. Any such examinations or monitoring will only be carried out by authorized staff.

Additionally, all emails sent or received through the City's email system are official City records. All City emails are subject to Freedom of Information Act and Maryland Public Information Act requests and can be legally compelled to be shown to law enforcement agencies or other parties.

Email Security:

Used inappropriately, email can be a source of security problems for the City. In order to minimize security issues, users of the City's email system must not:

- Open email attachments from unknown sources, in case they contain a virus, trojan, spyware or other malware.
- Disable security or email scanning software. These tools are essential to protect the City from security problems.
- Send confidential City data via email. The Information Systems department can advise on appropriate tools to use instead.
- Access another user's City email account. If they require access to a specific message (for instance, while an employee is off sick), they should approach their supervisor or the Information Systems department.

Staff members must always consider the security of the City's systems and data when using email. If required, help and guidance is available from line managers and the Information Systems department. Users should note that email is not inherently secure. Most emails transmitted over the internet are sent in plain text. This means they are vulnerable to interception. Although such interceptions are rare, it's best to regard email as an open communication system, not suitable for confidential messages and information.

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Contracts and Liability:

Users must be careful about making commitments or agreeing to purchases via email. An email message may form a legally-binding contract between the City and the recipient, even if the user has not obtained proper authorization. Users should always ensure that City business information sent via email is accurate, appropriate, ethical, and legal.

Email Etiquette:

Out of consideration for your co-workers, it is a good idea to exhibit appropriate email etiquette. To that end, users should:

- Not deliberately use the “reply all” function to communicate a personal message.
- Not forward chain emails or 'humorous' messages. These clog up people's in-boxes and some topics are not appropriate for the workplace
- Always use a meaningful subject line rather than leaving it blank or using a single word like 'hello'.
- Be sparing with group messages, only adding recipients who will find the message genuinely relevant and useful.
- Use the 'CC' (carbon copy) field sparingly. If someone really needs to receive a message, they should be included in the 'to' field.
- Use the 'BCC' (blind carbon copy) field to send group messages where appropriate.

Potential Sanctions:

Knowingly breaching this email use policy is a serious matter. Users who do so will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. Employees, contractors and other users may also be held personally liable for violating this policy. Where appropriate, the City of Takoma Park may involve the police or other law enforcement agencies in relation to breaches of this policy.