

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

(Updated August 1, 2018)

I) PURPOSE

- 1) The Town of Watertown Fire Department endorses the secure use of social media to enhance communication and information exchange; streamline processes; and foster productivity with its members. This policy establishes this fire department's position on the use and management of social media and provides guidelines on the management, administration, and oversight. This policy is not meant to address one particular form of social media; rather social media in general in general terms as technology will outpace our ability to discover emerging technology and create policies governing its use.

II) PHILOSOPHY

- 1) Social media provides a valuable means of assisting the fire department and its members in meeting community education, community information, fire prevention, and other related organizational and community objectives. This policy identifies possible uses that may be evaluated and utilized as deemed necessary to fire administrative and supervisory members. This department also recognizes the role that social media tools may play in the personal lives of department members. The personal use of social media can have an effect on fire departmental members in their official capacity as firefighters. This policy is a means to provide a precautionary nature as well as restrictions on the use of social media by department members.

III) DEFINITIONS

- 1) *Blog*: A self-published diary or commentary on a particular topic that may allow visitors to post responses, reactions, or comments.
- 2) *Post*: Content an individual shares on a social media site or the act of publishing content on a site.
- 3) *Profile*: Information that a user provides about himself or herself on a social networking site.
- 4) *Social Media*: A category of Internet based resources that enable the user to generate content and encourage other user participation. This includes, but is not limited to, social networking sites: Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia, blogs, and other sites. (There are thousands of these types of sites and this is only a short list.)
- 5) *Social Networks*: Platforms where users can create profiles, share information, and socialize with others using a range of technologies.
- 6) *Speech*: Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, videotape, or related forms of communication.

IV) POLICY

1. Strategic Policy for TWFD Social Media

- a) Determine strategy
 - i. Each social media page shall include an introductory statement that clearly specifies the purpose and scope of the agency's presence on the website.
 - ii. Social Media page(s) should link to the department's official website.

- iii. Social media page(s) shall be designed for the target audience(s) such as the community, civic leadership, members or potential recruits.
- b) Procedures
 - i. All department social media sites or pages shall be approved by the Chief of the Department or designee and shall be administered by the department's designee.
 - ii. Social media pages shall clearly indicate they are maintained by the fire department and shall have department logo and contact information prominently displayed.
 - iii. Social media content shall adhere to applicable laws, regulations, and policies.
 - iv. Social media pages should state that the opinions expressed by visitors to the page(s) do not reflect the opinions of the department.
 - v. Social Media pages shall clearly indicate that posted comments will be monitored and that the department designee reserves the right to remove obscenities, off-topic comments, and personal attacks.
 - vi. Social Media pages shall clearly indicate that any content posted or submitted for posting is subject to public disclosure.

2. Department-Sanctioned Use

- a) Department members representing the department via social media outlets shall do the following:
 - i) The use of department computers by department members to access social media is prohibited without authorization from the TWFD designee.
 - ii) Conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the department and, accordingly, shall adhere to all department standards of conduct and observe conventionally accepted protocols and proper decorum.
 - iii) Identify themselves as a member of the department.
 - iv) Post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate confidential information, including photographs or videos, related to department training, activities, or work-related assignments without permission.
 - v) Do not conduct political activities or private business.
 - vi) Department members use of personally owned devices to manage the department's social media activities or in the course of official duties is prohibited without permission.
 - vii) Members shall observe and abide by all copyright, trademark, and service mark restrictions in posting materials to electronic media.

3. Potential Uses

- a) Social media is a valuable investigative tool when providing information about
 - i) road closures,
 - ii) special events,
 - iii) weather emergencies, and
 - iv) major ongoing events in the jurisdiction that affects the entire community.
- b) Membership Opportunities - Persons seeking membership and volunteer positions use the Internet to search for opportunities.

4. Personal Use

- a) Precautions and Prohibitions

- i) Department members shall abide by the following when using social media.
 1. Department members 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.
 2. Department members are cautioned that their speech may not necessarily be protected speech under the First Amendment.
 - a. This may form the basis for discipline if deemed detrimental to the department.
 - b. Department members should assume that their speech and related activity on social media sites will reflect upon their position within the department and of this department.
 3. Department members shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any information to which they have access as a result of their membership without permission from the Fire Chief or designee.
 4. Adherence to the department's code of conduct is required in the personal use of social media. In particular, department members are prohibited from the following:
 - (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 members reflecting behavior that would reasonably be considered reckless or irresponsible.
 - (c) Department members may not divulge information gained by reason of their membership; 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.
 - (d) Department membership should be aware that they may be subject to civil litigation for publishing or posting information that harms the reputation of another person, group, or organization otherwise known as defamation to include:
 - (i) publishing or posting private facts and personal information about someone or
 - (ii) publishing the creative work of another, trademarks, or certain confidential business information.
 5. Department members should be aware that privacy settings and social media sites are constantly changing, and they should never assume that personal information posted on such sites is protected.
 6. Department members 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.

II) VIOLATIONS

- 1) Reporting violations.
 - (a) Any member 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 the chief or designee.
- 2) Violation of this social media policy will be brought to the Executive Committee for review and possible action being referred to the general membership.