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| HALIFAX FIRE DEPARTMENT R&R ARTICLE 28 | SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY |
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I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES

Social media sites, chat rooms, forums, and comment sections allow interactions between some people who would never have been able to communicate prior to their development. People with differing backgrounds, levels of experience and geographical regions can now share ideas, thoughts and practices; long lost friendships and acquaintances may be rediscovered; and news, methods and procedures may be shared. Electronic media has made many things, previously thought impossible, possible.

However, such media has also created previously unforeseen hazards. The topics of locker rooms, roll-call chatter and verbal horsing around, removed from those venues and publicly posted has ended careers, damaged reputations, and complicated or damaged otherwise sound prosecutions. Although the advent of social media is relatively new to fire departments, little have the hazards and pitfalls changed. To paper and the spoken word has been added electronic media, with a breadth and speed which far exceeds either.

The internet holds no secrets. Social media sites and forums are public and chat rooms have leaks. Never assume privacy or security on these sites. Always assume that what you post will be seen publicly. What is posted or e-mailed today may live forever, dredged from the depths of some nameless server by some search term on some search engine.

The topics and antics of the locker room and roll-call rooms may be kept in their proper context in those places – a joke; a prank; comradeship. The same in public, out of its element and out of context, damages reputations, destroys career's and impeaches witnesses.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of this department that:

1. Employees shall not, intentionally or unintentionally, bring discredit upon themselves or this agency through electronic devices and/or social media.
2. Employees shall not use electronic devices or social media to violate the policies, procedures, rules, or regulations of this agency.

3. Employees shall not disclose unauthorized or confidential information and/or materials using electronic devices or social media.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. *Chat*: Digital text communications between two or more persons. The text is generally posted in the order sent for all of the participants to read.
- B. *Electronic Devices*: Cellular telephones, Ipads, digital cameras, mobile computers, mini-computers, desktop computers, and other devices used to store or transfer data, live audio or video, location or other information.
- C. *Forum*: Discussion areas on web sites where people can post messages and make comments. Some forums allow users to upload images, audio, video and other files.
- D. *Friends*: On social networking sites, friends are individuals or organizations that you authorize to view the materials that you and others post to your site, and may allow you to view the materials posted on their site.
- E. *Peer-to-Peer*: The connection of two or more individuals or organizations through a network. Peer-to-peer is often associated with file sharing.
- F. *Profiles*: Information, images, audio, and/or video that a person or organization provides about themselves on a social networking site.
- G. *Public Domain*: Materials or access available to the public without any special permission or access.
- H. *Social Media*: A platform for individuals and organizations to interact and/or share information and electronic content. Examples include Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.
- I. *Social Networking*: A platform for individuals and organizations to communicate and share information with others at varying levels of their social network. Some well-known social networking sites are: Facebook, Twitter, My Space and LinkedIn. In addition, various “fire” sites are now available for firefighters and potentially others to post information and video.

IV. PROCEDURES

- A. Department Authorized Social Media:
 1. Authorization: no employee shall create, maintain, or contribute to any social media site representing the Halifax Fire Department unless authorized by Chief of Department.
 2. *Sites*: Specific authorization must be obtained for each site or profile.
 3. Profile: Official department profiles or the department profiles of individual employees reflect upon the agency and staff as a whole. Official sites must be presented in a professional and honorable

manner which will not discredit the department, its mission, or employees.

4. Content

- a. Site content may be reviewed for compliance with this policy. Content which, in the opinion of the Chief of Department, is not in compliance with department policy or is inappropriate may be ordered removed.
- b. Personnel Information:
 - 1) Official Personal Information: Official sites may include official information regarding the agency and employees. Official information includes, but is not limited to:
 - a) Date of hire;
 - b) Years of service;
 - c) Previous fire department employment;
 - d) Previous military service;
 - e) Present military status;
 - f) Present department assignment;
 - g) Rank;
 - h) Specialty training
 - i) Performance awards and achievements;
 - j) Educational achievements; and
 - k) Any public record information.
 - 2) General Personal Information: Individual employees may authorize their general personal information to be presented. General personal information includes, but is not limited to:
 - a) Home city or town;
 - b) Present city or town of residence;
 - c) Age;
 - d) Present marital status, children;
 - e) Present military assignment;
 - 3) Specific information about employees and their family members shall not be posted. Specific personal information includes, but is not limited to:
 - a) Dates of birth of employees or family members;
 - b) Addresses of employees or family members;
 - c) Personal telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, etc.

- 4) No personal information other than official personal information may be posted about any employee against that employee's wishes.
- c. Images:
 - 1) Official department images are authorized to be published on official department sites. Official department images include, but are not limited to:
 - a) Town/City seal;
 - b) Department patch;
 - c) Department badges;
 - d) Department personnel: On duty photos and images of department personnel.
 - e) Department buildings;
 - f) Department vehicles;
 - 2) Department controlled images remain the property of the department. Such images may be posted if authorized by the Chief of Department. Department controlled images include, but are not limited to:
 - a) Photos and/or video taken while on duty;
 - b) Photos and/or video taken in areas not open to the public;
 - c) Photos and/or video of emergency scenes and/or victims.
- d. Confidentiality:
 - 1) Information considered confidential shall not be posted unless authorized by the Chief of Department.
 - 2) Nothing posted on any social networking site can ever be considered confidential.
- e. Opinion: Statements and content should represent those of the agency and not personal opinions.
 - 1) Individual writers may state opinion when promoting department services, such as relating personal experiences when receiving such services.
 - 2) Individual writers may state opinion when writing blogs or articles, provided an opinion disclaimer is used.
5. Personal Messaging:
 - a. Employees engaged in personal messaging must keep such messaging professional at all times.
 - b. Be mindful of and guard against messages which may be considered inappropriate.

- c. Be cautious when communicating outside of public areas with children and persons with whom personal involvement would be considered inappropriate.
 - d. Avoid messages which include disbursing personal, C.O.R.I., investigative or other confidential information. Such messaging cannot be considered confidential or secure. Sensitive messages should be communicated through more secure means.
6. Prohibited Content: The following content is prohibited.
- a. Discrimination (race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, etc.);
 - b. Obscene materials;
 - c. Harassment, including sexual harassment;
 - d. Infringement of copyrighted material;
 - e. Conduct of personal business, outside business, or promotion of private businesses.
 - f. Expression of support of any political party or candidates.

B. Personal Social Media

1. Generally:
 - a. The department will generally limit its inquiring into an employee's off-duty conduct to situations impacting or reflecting upon the department or affecting the employee's ability or fitness for duty.
 - b. The department has a legitimate interest in preserving the public's trust and respect. An employee's off-duty personal relationships and conduct must not bring discredit to the employee or department, impact on the Department's operation, affect the employees; ability to perform his or her job or result in poor job performance.
 - c. Employees must be aware that inappropriate comments, files, images and other materials posted by them or affiliated with their on-line profile may damage their fitness to serve in the eyes of the public.
2. Conduct Unbecoming
 - a. Employees do not sever their relationship with the department at the end of their shift. A department members off-duty conduct, especially where there is some nexus or connection to the department where the status as a firefighter is or becomes known, may reflect unfavorably on both the firefighter and department.
 - b. Employees must be aware that prohibited conduct, on or off duty, and the disciplinary offense of "conduct unbecoming" applies to social networking, blogging, chat, and other on-line activity as well.
 - c. Do not cross the line between funny and inappropriate.

- d. Employees must be mindful that violation of department rules, regulations, policies, and procedures apply to employees' on-line activities.
3. Identification of Social Media Activity for Internal Investigations.
During the course of a departmental investigation, employees may:
- a. Be ordered to provide the department, or its designated investigator, a listing of and access (e.g., password, user name, etc.) to any social media and social networking platforms in which they participate or maintain.
 - b. Be ordered to complete an affidavit attesting to all of the social media and social networking platforms in which they participate or maintain.
4. Prohibited: The following activities are prohibited on an employee's personal social networking sites:
- a. Postings or material that detracts from the department's mission;
 - b. Criminal Offender Record Information (C.O.R.I) or other protected information.
 - c. Sexually graphic and explicit materials of any kind including nude or sexually suggestive images of the employee;
 - d. Disparaging remarks or materials targeting the Town of Halifax or department employees or their family members.
 - e. Disparaging remarks or materials targeting persons, organizations, or businesses which the employee has dealt with due to department employment.
 - f. Harassment, including sexual harassment;
 - g. Criminal behavior;
 - h. Threats against the President of the United States;
 - i. Displaying images of other employees without their permission.
5. Strongly Discouraged: The following may be within an employee's speech rights, but could pose a risk of conduct unbecoming. Again, an employee's public posting could damage an employee's fitness to serve as firefighter. Embarrassing or inappropriate material which is posted may be publicly available forever.
- a. Rude, discourteous, or discouraging remarks;
 - b. Comments regarding personal drunkenness or heavy alcohol use.