



Ocean City Police Department
Standard Operating Procedure

S.O.P. – ADM 014

Effective: 03/16/17

Subject: Department Sanctioned Social Media Use

Table of Contents

- I. Purpose**
- II. Definitions**
 - A. Post(s)
 - B. Profile
 - C. Social Media
 - D. Speech
- III. Policy**
- IV. Required Training**
- V. General Guidelines**
- VI. Prohibitions / Restrictions**
- VII. Management and Oversight**
- VIII. Appendix**

I. Purpose

The Department strives to provide the community and the public at large with accurate and timely information, communicated in a professional manner and in accordance with the laws regarding dissemination of public information. In furtherance of this objective the Department will utilize internet based social media platforms as a means of communicating information.

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines concerning employee use of the Department's various social media platforms when speaking on behalf of the Department for official informational purposes. This policy also provides for the management, administration, and oversight of Department social media. Private use of social media is delineated in General Order 200 B-3 "Social Networking".

II. Definitions

- A. **Post(s):** Any content distributed, published or shared by an employee on a Department social media site, or the act of distributing, publishing or sharing content on a social media site.
- B. **Profile:** Information about the Department that is publicly shared on its social media outlets which is the digital representation of the Department in the given social media environment.
- C. **Social Media:** A category of internet based resource systems that allow individuals / organizations to construct public or semi-public digital profiles within that system in order to electronically communicate and disseminate information, ideas, or other user-created content. Social media design and functionality varies from platform to platform.
- D. **Speech:** Expression or communication of thoughts, facts, events or opinions in spoken word, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, video, or related forms of communication.

III. Policy

The Department recognizes that social media provides a valuable means of assisting the Department in meeting community outreach, crime prevention, and public service objectives. The Department's Public Affairs Office maintains various social media platforms as a means of interacting with the community and will utilize a limited number of trained employees to supplement Public Affairs in the dissemination of information via social media as appropriate and within the guidelines of this policy.

IV. Required Training

All employees who are granted access to the Department's social media accounts shall attend an approved Departmental training coordinated and administered by Public Affairs, prior to being given access to Department social media accounts.



V. General Guidelines

- A. Department employees who are authorized to speak on behalf of the Department via the Department's social media platforms shall:
1. Use computers, mobile phones, computer and phone applications, programs or software, internet resources and network/internet communications in a responsible, professional, ethical, and lawful manner consistent with this policy and with other established practices and policies of the Town of Ocean City to include General Order 800 I-2 "Mobile Wireless Communication Device Use".
 2. Conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the Department, and accordingly shall adhere to all Department standards of conduct and proper decorum.
 3. Protect confidential and proprietary information as social media blurs many of the traditional boundaries between internal and external communications.
 4. Obtain permission/consent from individuals before posting their photograph or publishing content of a conversation that was meant to be private.
 5. Consider the purpose of all social media use. Online communications and social media posting must not negatively impact an employee's ability to carry out assigned tasks or the Department mission.
 6. Immediately correct any errors in posts, or bring the error(s) to the attention of Public Affairs as soon as the error(s) are discovered so that they can be corrected.
- B. In most circumstances Department social media posts will be limited to the following:
1. Community Outreach
 - a. Crime prevention tips
 - b. Sharing crime maps/data
 - c. Special Event information
 2. Public Safety Notifications
 - a. Road closures
 - b. Weather emergencies



C. Investigative Purposes

The Department may, under some circumstances utilize social media platforms for the dissemination of information, or the soliciting of information for the following purposes:

1. Missing / Endangered Persons
2. Wanted Persons
3. Soliciting tips about unsolved crimes

In these instances, the use of social media will be at the direction, and with the approval of the Commander / Supervisor charged with the responsibility of the investigation, and under the guidance of Public Affairs.

VI. Prohibitions / Restrictions

- A. Employees who utilize personally owned computers or cellular telephones to access and/or disseminate information using Department social media shall sign the Department's Notice/Waiver (Appendix) prior to being given account access.
- B. Employees should be aware that the data transmitted or stored on personal devices may be considered to be public records subject to disclosure under the Maryland Public Information Act or by court subpoena. All use of personally owned computer or phone devices for social media posts shall be in compliance with General Order 800 I-2.
- C. Any statements about the guilt or innocence of any suspect, arrestee, pending prosecutions are prohibited.
- D. The posting of photographs or video related to Department activities, training or work-related assignments is prohibited without the approval of the Department.
- E. Political speech, religious speech, other speech that can be interpreted as inflammatory or speech that would violate any Department policy is prohibited.
- F. Conducting any private or personal affairs via the Department's social media is prohibited.
- G. Posts on the Department's social media are considered positions and responses of the Department. Employee personal opinions do not belong in official Department statements and are prohibited.
- H. Social media must not be used to transmit information or knowingly connect to internet sites for unlawful or prohibited purposes, including, but not limited to websites that:
 1. Discriminate on the basis of sex, race, creed, color, gender, religion, age, marital status, national origin, sensory, mental, or physical disability, sexual orientation or veteran status.



2. Convey, promote or condone sexual harassment.
 3. Contain sexual or obscene content or materials.
 4. Transmit protected or private information.
 5. Infringe on any copyright.
 6. Express any campaign, political or religious beliefs.
- H. Requests for information outside the scope of an individual's duties, job knowledge, or scope of authority should be routed to the appropriate employees. Only information that is readily available to the public shall be disseminated.
- I. Information about agency personnel, potential litigation, or controversial issues shall not be disseminated or otherwise transmitted via Department social media.
- J. Personnel are not permitted to participate in any interview, on-camera or off-camera, recorded or non-recorded unless specifically authorized by the Department. All requests for in-person interviews shall be routed to and coordinated by Public Affairs.

VII. Management & Oversight

- A. All Department social media accounts will be established, maintained and monitored by the Public Affairs Office with approval of the Chief of Police.
- B. Public Affairs, where possible, shall ensure that each social media platform and account maintained by the Department clearly indicates that it is owned and managed by the Department and shall have Department contact information available where possible.
- C. Use of Department social media shall be directed via Public Affairs, who is responsible for the oversight of all content contained, distributed, or published through the various social media accounts.
- D. The Department has the authority to monitor authorized employee use of the Internet to ensure appropriate use. Failure to abide by the Department's policies established for appropriate use of social media may result in the loss of access privileges and or disciplinary action.

VIII. Appendix

References: G.O. 200 B-3, G.O. 800 I-2			
Supersedes:			Legal Review / Approval: 03/14/2017
Distribution Date: 03/15/2017	Distribution Type: "A"	Chief of Police Signature:	

