



PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND
FIRE/EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDER

General Order Number: 11-19	Effective Date: October 23, 2019
Division: Personnel Management	
Chapter: Code of Conduct	
By Order of the Fire Chief: Benjamin M. Barksdale	Issue Date: October 23, 2019

POLICY

This General Order establishes standards of conduct for all sworn and civilian employees and volunteer members (personnel) of the Prince George's County Fire/Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Department for both on- and off-duty conduct. In concurrence with the Fire/EMS Department's Code of Ethics and "THE PROMISE," it is the intention of the Department to maintain the trust of its citizens which is necessary for providing a high quality of service. Professional affiliation with the Fire/EMS Department is a privilege, not an entitlement. The Department can only succeed in its mission if its personnel maintain their personal and professional integrity. All personnel are responsible for their own conduct. The personal and collective integrity of the Fire/EMS Department is one of the foremost responsibilities of all personnel. All are expected to apply these standards to their conduct as a whole, and standards remain applicable regardless of whether the conduct was in-person or through some other means, such as social media.

This General Order is not meant to be an exhaustive list of every possible offense, but rather provide a general description of certain types of misconduct, whether committed on or off-duty, for which personnel may be disciplined. The absence of a specific provision covering an act does not mean that act is condoned, permissible, or would not result in disciplinary action, provided there is a nexus between the misconduct, the individual's duties, and/or the efficiency of the Department. All personnel remain responsible for familiarity with all General Orders, County procedures, and applicable federal, State and local laws. Failure to comply with these standards of conduct could result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

DEFINITIONS

Conduct Related Violation – An act or acts which constitutes a violation(s) or failure(s) to comply with any duty, obligation or requirement imposing a standard of conduct or behavior on personnel by virtue of the provisions of any criminal or civil law or statute or any rule or regulation authorized and promulgated pursuant thereto, provided such violation(s) or act(s) of noncompliance. These acts bear a demonstrable relationship to the nature of the duties and responsibilities of the personnel's position; and constitutes a willful, indifferent, or grossly negligent act of commission by such personnel. Prince George's County Code, Subtitle 16, Personnel Law, Section 16-193.

Discrimination – An action, practice or policy, however neutral in intent and impartial in administration, which has a disparate impact or results in disparate treatment because of retaliation or being a member of a Protected Class.



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Extended Relationship/Fraternization – In concurrence with Administrative Procedure 228 – Fraternization Policy, a relationship between a supervisor and subordinate that is romantic or intimate in nature. Examples of supervisory/subordinate relationships may include, but are not limited to, a Station Officer with a subordinate, or personnel or instructors with a recruit school trainee, high school cadet, or Junior Firefighter/EMT. An extended relationship can also include a blood relative.

Personnel – Any career or volunteer person that is professionally affiliated with the Prince George's Fire/EMS Department. This includes civilian and administrative personnel.

Protected Class – Characteristics that should not be used to discriminate, retaliate against or harass personnel. Characteristics include Race, Ethnicity/National Origin, Religion or Creed, Color, Age, Sex, Political Opinion, Personal Appearance, Marital Status, Familial Status, Mental or Physical Disability, Genetic Information, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Occupation and Pregnancy.

Supervisor – Personnel that are part of the Command Staff, Volunteer Chiefs, Station Officers, Administrative Managers, or any persons who have the authority to supervise, issue directives, evaluate performance and/or initiate disciplinary action based upon their rank or classification.

Subordinate – Any affiliated individual who is subject to the supervision or directives of another affiliated individual based on their rank, classification and seniority in certain circumstances.

PROCEDURES / RESPONSIBILITIES

I. General Provisions

- A. All personnel are expected to comply with all General Orders, policies and procedures of the Fire/EMS Department as well as the Prince George's County Government.
- B. Professional Demeanor and Appearance
 - 1. The public holds high expectations of conduct and professionalism from uniformed public service personnel. Presenting a friendly, professional demeanor and maintaining a clean, neat and physically fit appearance are part of these expectations. These attributes help instill the public with a sense of confidence in the Fire/EMS Department services. Personnel shall always conduct themselves in a manner that creates respect for diversity, inclusion and commitment to the well-being of others. Prince George's County Personnel Law §16-108.
 - a) When in public, personnel shall view every encounter with a citizen as an opportunity to build trust and confidence in the Fire/EMS Department. They shall always be prepared to provide prompt, friendly assistance to a citizen upon request and attempt to provide concise answers to any Fire/EMS related questions as time permits.



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- b) A key component of projecting a professional demeanor is wearing a uniform or work attire that is clean, ironed and appropriately sized. Personnel shall not wear uniforms that are excessively worn, discolored, or ill-fitting. Additionally, only uniforms, patches and shirts approved by the Fire Chief under *General Order 10-01, Career Uniforms*, shall be worn when riding Fire/EMS Department apparatus, providing Fire/EMS services and attending Fire/EMS Department related events. With the exception of "Heat Stress Watch" alerts for emergency operations, shorts, unapproved shirts, t-shirts, tank tops, and blue jeans are strictly prohibited when providing Fire/EMS services. Personnel shall also maintain personal hygiene and grooming according to *General Order 08-11, Personal Grooming*.

C. On-Duty Non-Emergency Activities in Public

- 1. Personnel of the Fire/EMS Department shall maintain an awareness of how their actions could be perceived by a citizen and how the appearance of leisure in public during times of low call volumes could be perceived as a waste of public resources. When on duty and engaging in non-emergency activities, personnel shall always move in an expeditious manner. They shall never behave in a manner that could be reasonably perceived as a casual disregard for public resources or would diminish the mission and integrity of the Fire/EMS Department. Personnel shall also:
 - a) Remain in a physical condition and location that is ready for emergency response.
 - b) Refrain from all activities that distract from or encroach upon work responsibilities.
 - c) Never leave their assigned first due response area without notifying their immediate supervisor.
 - d) Return to service immediately after completing all post-emergency service call responsibilities.

D. Conduct in Fire Stations

- 1. Personnel are expected to comply with all professional standards of conduct including those related to work uniforms and personal grooming while in fire stations. Any activities that are intended to foster team building and comradery among the crew shall be consistent with the standards outlined in this policy. Station Officers and volunteer leadership are responsible for the adherence to these standards. The following conduct and actions are strictly prohibited in fire stations:
 - a) Watching or listening to any content on County or personal media devices containing excessive violence, vulgarity, nudity, pornography and/or any insensitive content that is offensive or derogatory toward a legally protected class as defined in this General Order.



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- b) Inviting guests for the purpose of sexual activity or any activity that is not appropriate for a professional environment.
- c) Wearing inappropriate attire (i.e. underwear, boxers, leggings, biker shorts, short shorts, tank tops etc.).
- d) Harboring guests and long term "live-ins" who do not make a regular, positive contribution to Fire/EMS Department services.
- e) Using the station public address system for jokes and horseplay.
- f) Displaying and/or distributing offensive or pornographic material.
- g) Conversations and jokes that are potentially offensive and derogatory toward a person in the legally protected class.
- h) Distributing or consuming alcohol, drugs or any mind-altering substance in violation of Administrative Procedure 224 - Substance Abuse Policy.
- i) Gambling or unlawful betting (includes use of Departmental property or internet).

E. Judgment and Decision Making

1. All personnel are expected to exercise sound, ethical judgment in both professional and private matters. Personnel shall honor the mission and integrity of the Fire/EMS Department with an optimal work effort at all times. Personnel shall always prioritize providing quality service over personal disagreements and differences.
2. Personnel shall at all times operate within all applicable laws and regulations, including, but not limited to, the Fire/EMS Department, Prince George's County, NFPA, and Maryland Occupational Safety and Health (MOSH) regulations. Through teamwork, personnel shall always strive to deliver high quality service to the citizens, businesses and general community of Prince George's County.
3. In exercising sound, ethical judgment and decision making, personnel have an obligation to report any actions that they suspect or become aware of that are illegal or could be construed as an abuse of one's position in the Fire/EMS Department for personal gain.

F. Supervisor Conduct

1. Supervisors are expected to provide leadership through their example of sound judgment and expert decision-making. They are expected to model the highest standard of conduct without compromise. They shall provide appropriate direction, as necessary, to subordinates in all matters that could jeopardize the public's trust in the Fire/EMS



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Department. They shall also always uphold the concept of dignity and mutual respect in all professional interactions. A supervisor shall not issue any order that would require a subordinate to commit an act contrary to law or Departmental rules and regulations.

2. The integrity in decision-making and judgement of supervisors shall remain above reproach. A supervisor's integrity and conduct shall be regarded by subordinates as motivation to pursue excellence in their professional and personal life.

G. Criminal Activity

1. Members shall obey all local, State, and federal laws and the laws of any foreign country they visit, on- and off-duty. Any member who is either being investigated or has been investigated, arrested, and/or charged in relation to criminal acts shall notify the Fire/EMS Department immediately in accordance with *General Order 11-16, Notification of Arrest – License Revocation*. This notification also applies to serious and/or incarcerable traffic violations, as well as any protective, peace or any other type of restraining order that has been issued, regardless of jurisdiction. Under this policy, the Fire/EMS Department has the right to take disciplinary action against any member who has been directly or indirectly involved in any criminal matter. From a disciplinary standpoint, the Department may take action based upon pending criminal investigations, charges, or citations, without a confirmed conviction. Examples include, but are not limited to:
 - a) All felony and misdemeanor offenses, including any traffic offense that involves drugs, alcohol, bodily injury, leaving the scene of an accident under any circumstances, or an arrest under Maryland Transportation Code §26-202.
 - b) Possession of weapons on Fire/EMS Department property without proper authorization.
 - c) Any conviction, guilty plea, finding of guilt, plea of nolo contendere, or probation before judgment is considered an admission of a violation of this section.
 - d) Any conduct that would otherwise fit the definition of a criminal violation, regardless of whether the individual has been criminally charged or found guilty.

H. Appropriate Use of Work Hours

1. Personnel are to report for duty on time or early and avoid tardiness whenever possible. They are expected to work in compliance with all local and state laws, Fire/EMS Department General Orders, memorandums, medical protocols and Provider Actions Notices. They shall maintain all required professional certifications. Under no circumstances may an individual leave their assigned work area without permission or approved leave except in the case of an emergency, which will require immediate



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notification to a supervisor. While on duty, personnel are expected to devote their full time and attention to their work responsibilities.

2. It is expected that personnel of all ranks and seniority prioritize day time work hours (0700-1500) for job-related training and education when not providing emergency service. Regularly misusing non-emergency work hours is considered a conduct related violation.

I. Chain-of-Command:

1. Personnel shall always observe and obey the chain-of-command in accordance with *General Order 01-03, Chain-of-Command*. They shall always address personnel that is a supervisor by their rank first, if applicable, followed by their last name in all professional communications. They shall also work toward the efficient operation of all Fire/EMS Department programs and seek to maintain respectful interactions with their supervisor by carefully following instructions in a positive and cooperative manner.
2. Similarly, supervisors shall not, as a common practice, issue directives to or regularly facilitate discussions concerning Fire/EMS Department business with subordinates who are more than two levels below their rank or grade. This practice has the potential to convey the appearance of giving an individual preferential treatment. Supervisors shall not allow or participate in inappropriate or unproductive discussions in the workplace.

J. Insubordination

1. Personnel shall not intentionally engage in conduct, through words, actions, or omissions which are disrespectful, or otherwise undermine the authority of the supervisor or chain-of-command. Personnel shall comply with orders and directives of a superior or individual authorized to be in command or has been delegated authority. This includes cooperation with investigations and answering questions asked by investigators with the Office of Professional Standards, Equal Employment Opportunity Office, or Internal Affairs, regardless of rank.
2. If a supervisor gives an order that is in conflict with an existing order or regulation, the subordinate shall respectfully notify the supervisor. If the order is repeated, the subordinate shall obey the order. A subordinate shall comply with the order regardless of whether the supervisor and subordinate are in the same chain-of-command, or if the order from a supervisor is being relayed by an individual of equal or lesser rank.

K. Violence, Aggression and Intimidation

1. In accordance with *General Order 08-14, Preventing Violence in the Workplace*, and Administrative Procedure 513 – Managing Workplace Disturbances, personnel shall never engage in violence or acts of intimidation in the workplace and make every attempt to avoid these situations in their personal lives. Personnel shall never harass,



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threaten, physically or sexually assault any member of the Fire/EMS Department or citizen. Personnel must immediately report any incident of verbal or physical threats and abuse to their supervisors and call 911 if they observe an act or threat of violence and a supervisor is not present to immediately intervene. Supervisors should take immediate action upon receiving reports or observing such acts and make proper notifications through the chain-of-command and/or to law enforcement to ensure the immediate safety of all involved and that a prompt investigation takes place. All personnel will cooperate with law enforcement agencies in the investigation and prosecution of any individual who commits or threatens to commit a violent act at a County work site.

L. Avoiding High Risk Encounters

1. Personnel are expected not to engage or be involved in situations where they could be injured, or where their actions could be misconstrued as an accessory to any violent behavior. If any personnel encounter a volatile exchange with a citizen, or any volatile exchange involving a member of the Fire/EMS Department, that person shall make a reasonable attempt to diffuse the situation only if it is deemed absolutely safe and legal to do so. Personnel shall become familiar with de-escalation strategies which are suggested in *General Order 08-14, Preventing Violence in the Workplace*. No member shall ever attempt to obstruct any police intervention or investigation in such matters. Personnel shall make every effort to avoid both social settings and individuals that would place them in a compromising situation that could bring the Fire/EMS Department into disrepute. High risk activities include, but are not limited to:
 - a) Social events with excessive alcohol consumption and intoxication.
 - b) Driving after social events where alcohol has been consumed.
 - c) Social events where illegal drug use is present.
 - d) Social events in locations that are known to be prone to violence, gang and illegal activity.
 - e) Socializing with individuals who are known to have a propensity or history of violence or regularly engage in criminal activity, are under criminal investigation or indictment, or have any reputation for felonious or criminal behavior, except as required to perform official duties or where unavoidable due to family relationship.

M. Extended Relationships and Fraternization

1. The Fire/EMS Department recognizes and upholds the personal rights of personnel in concurrence with Administrative Procedure 228. These relationships have the potential to cause workplace conflict due to the inherent perception of bias and conflicted interests. Because of these risks, all personnel are expected to adhere to the following standards of conduct:



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- a) Personnel in a supervisory position are strictly prohibited from maintaining extended relationships with a subordinate member that is within their chain-of-command. This includes instructors and recruits, trainees, cadets, and junior firefighters/EMTs.
- b) Personnel are strictly prohibited from initiating extended relationships with any minor, such as a junior firefighters/EMT, intern or high school trainee (cadet).
- c) In the event that any personnel in a supervisory position establishes an extended relationship with another subordinate, he or she shall immediately notify an appropriate authority to evaluate the need for reassignment. If necessary, these personnel should work in a separate chain-of-command (i.e. separate days/shifts and/or work sites) when possible. The Fire/EMS Department places the responsibility of compliance with this policy on the personnel that is in the supervisory position.
- d) Fire/EMS Department personnel who are on the same shift in the same location or working in the same office in extended relationships when there is no supervisor involved shall also immediately notify an appropriate authority to be evaluated for possible reassignment. It is expected that all personnel in extended relationships maintain professional conduct when they encounter one another in the workplace. The Department is a paramilitary work environment and personnel shall refrain from any actions that could be perceived as an infringement upon the discipline and structure of this work environment. Personnel shall also avoid any overt displays of affection including sexual activity while on duty, as well as actions that would delay or distract themselves or others from work responsibilities, or otherwise appear unprofessional. Incidental or temporary assignments shorter than thirty (30) calendar days are not considered a violation of this policy.
- e) Supervisors and investigators shall avoid situations where they are investigating an incident or disciplinary matter that involves a romantic partner, spouse, blood relative, or other close relationship (i.e. close friends, mentor/mentee, preceptors, partners for several years). In such situations, immediate disclosure must be made to an appropriate authority to determine what, if any, conflict of interest exists and to what degree. In some situations, an investigation may be reassigned to avoid an appearance of impropriety.

N. Inappropriate Use of Credentials

- 1. Personnel shall never use their position with the Fire/EMS Department for any material or improper benefit or personal gain, or for the improper benefit of another, which is not otherwise available to the general public. This includes the use of uniforms, badges, identification or insignias for the purpose of personal gain or in association with advertisements, political activity, commercial business, or any other purpose without permission from the Fire Chief or in violation of local, state, or federal law. Prince George's County Code, Subtitle 2, Division 17 - Code of Ethics.



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2. Off-duty personnel may participate in political activity, but not on County grounds during work hours, and when otherwise prohibited by federal or state law. Personnel may testify as a citizen in any hearing on behalf of or in opposition to any local, state, or federal legislation, provided they do not wear any items that would identify them as a member of the Department or otherwise represent himself or herself as a spokesperson for the Department. This paragraph does not apply to personnel performing duties related to union business.

O. Honesty and Integrity

1. Personnel shall be truthful in all communications. They shall not intentionally or willfully make any statement, verbal or written, or withhold material information associated with the individual's position, official duties, Department investigation, criminal investigation, or the Department's official business. Personnel shall not lie, cheat, steal, or make intentionally deceptive statements associated with their position, official duties, or the Department's official business. Personnel shall not knowingly enter or cause to be entered any inaccurate or false information into an official record of the Department.

P. Conduct Unbecoming

1. As one of the most visible representatives of government, personnel must display exemplary professional conduct at all times. Even the appearance of impropriety can have far reaching effects on the Department. Personnel shall avoid excessive, unwarranted, or unjustified behavior that would reflect poorly on themselves, the Department, the profession, or the County government, regardless of duty status. Conduct unbecoming includes any conduct that would bring the individual, the Department, or the County government into disrepute or dishonor, undermine the public trust, disgrace the integrity of the profession, or otherwise be detrimental to the operation and efficiency of the Department. This type of violation can take many forms, including actions, omissions, or language.

Q. Information System Access and Use

1. Personnel are always expected to access Fire/EMS Department information systems in an appropriate manner and in compliance with all applicable laws including the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA). In concurrence with Administrative Procedure 119 – Electronic Information Policy, personnel have an obligation to protect information concerning the Fire/EMS Department and citizens. Personnel shall also not use their position with the Fire/EMS Department to access and/or misuse personally identifiable information related to other personnel or citizens without an authorized, legitimate purpose related to official duties. Fire/EMS Department information systems shall only be used to access information for completing work-related tasks such as patient care reports, training, call data entry, etc.



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R. Communication

1. Personnel are strictly prohibited from communicating to the public in any medium on behalf of the Fire/EMS Department unless authorized by the Fire Chief. Personnel are also expected by the public to maintain certain standards of personal conduct in their communications with each other, with the public, and in the public domain. Personnel shall refrain from using harsh, violence, profane, or discriminatory language in the workplace or with the public. It is expected that all personnel will be courteous and respectful in all communications.
2. Personnel shall not disclose or disseminate any information, documents, photos or recordings obtained by the Department or pursuant to official duties that is confidential and not generally available to the public, except as authorized by the Department. Personnel will observe confidentiality and privacy of all persons as required by the Department, local, State, and federal law, including, but not limited to, the Maryland Confidentiality of Medical Records Act, HIPAA, and the Maryland Public Information Act.

S. Prevention and Safety

1. Personnel shall provide service to mitigate and eliminate threats to safety and property. Therefore, personnel shall commit to this mission through participation in continued education, training, and effective, timely response to all emergencies.
2. Personnel shall never disregard operational guidelines, especially those pertaining to safety. They shall also maintain familiarity and work in compliance with all safety regulations, applicable General Orders, and National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) standards.

T. Discrimination:

1. All personnel shall conduct themselves within the boundaries of all federal, state, and local laws and statutes, and the provisions of *General Order 11-06, Equal Employment Opportunity Policy*. All personnel have a responsibility to provide and ensure a workplace committed to fairness and equity. Retaliation for protected activity will not be tolerated. Personnel are required to report any incidents of discrimination or harassment in a timely fashion in accordance with the General Order. It is expected that services will be provided to the public regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or any other protected class. Supervisors will be held to a higher standard in the event of unreported misconduct or perpetuation of discriminatory behavior.



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U. Equipment and Property Maintenance

1. Personnel must ensure that Fire/EMS Department equipment and property are maintained in their best condition for both operational performance and presentation to the public. This includes ensuring that vehicles and apparatus are regularly cleaned and maintained, complying with regularly scheduled equipment checks (i.e. saws, lights, ladders, Lifepaks, Video Laryngoscope, narcotics, etc.), and ensuring that all property, especially fire stations (i.e. exterior grounds, bathrooms, bunkrooms, common areas, etc.) remain clean and presentable.

REFERENCES

Prince George's County, Maryland Code of Ordinances, Subtitle 1, §1-107 County seal; use.

Prince George's County Maryland Code of Ordinances, Subtitle 2 – Administration, Division 17 – Code of Ethics, §2-290, §2-293.

Prince George's County Maryland Code of Ordinances, Subtitle 16 – Personnel Law, §16-108 Appointing authorities, supervisors, and employees; general responsibilities.

Prince George's County Maryland Code of Ordinances, Subtitle 16 – Personnel Law, Division 2 – Attendance; Division 13 – Discipline.

Administrative Procedure 119. *Electronic Information Policy*. Prince George's County Government.

Administrative Procedure 224. *Substance Abuse Policy*. Prince George's County Government.

Administrative Procedure 228. *Fraternization Policy*. Prince George's County Government.

Administrative Procedure 513. *Managing Workplace Disturbances*. Prince George's County Government.

Code of Ethics, Prince George's County Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department.

THE PROMISE, Prince George's County Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department.

FORMS / ATTACHMENTS

N/A