



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

General Order Number: 11-29	Effective Date: November 4, 2019
Division: Personnel Management	
Chapter: Social Media and Publication Policy	
By Order of the Fire Chief: Tiffany D. Green <i>TJG</i>	Issue Date: November 4, 2019

POLICY

This General Order establishes guidelines for employees and members ("personnel") of the Prince George's County Fire/Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Department regarding the use of social media. This policy is not meant to address one particular form of social media, but social media in general. It is the intention of the Fire/EMS Department to maintain the trust of the citizens we serve, which is critical to providing a high quality of service. Maintaining this trust involves ensuring the appropriate conduct in social media platforms.

The Department supports the right of personnel to express a diversity of viewpoints under the rights guaranteed by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. With respect to freedom of speech, employees and members of the Fire/EMS Department are also expected by the public to maintain certain standards of personal conduct. These standards of conduct inevitably apply to the use of social media. Even though personnel can express his or her own opinion on issues of public interest, personnel are restricted from expressing that opinion in an official capacity as a Department employee or member or representing that view as the view of the Department. Even if not done intentionally, social media content can be imputed to the Department when a user's profile, account, and/or conduct on social media indicate affiliation with the Department with logos, photos, or indicating an occupation or place of work.

PROCEDURES/RESPONSIBILITIES

I. General Provisions

- A. The Department uses social media to communicate important information to the public such as real time updates on high profile emergency events, community outreach and education, demonstrations and training activities, as well as the special recognition of employees, volunteers and citizens. Communication to the public on behalf of the Fire/EMS Department through social media platforms is primarily facilitated by the Department's Public Information Officer. Personnel are prohibited from communicating on behalf of the Fire/EMS Department through social media without authorization by the Fire Chief.
- B. Personnel who wish to share photos that would be beneficial to the public or would positively reinforce the Fire/EMS Department's mission shall submit this information to the Office of Public Information through their immediate supervisor or manager.
- C. Personnel are prohibited from using social media while on-duty in a manner that would inhibit, delay or compromise the quality of services provided by the Fire/EMS Department.



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

- D. Users should not assume any expectation of privacy when posting information to the Internet or a social media site, regardless of user privacy settings or other access controls. In accordance with Administrative Procedure 119, there is no expectation of privacy when using any of the County's electronic information systems, which includes email, internet access, and information created, sent, forwarded, received or saved. Such information may be subject to retrieval and disclosure at any time for litigation discovery, Maryland Public Information Act requests, law enforcement, or any regulatory investigations.

II. Safeguarding Information and Privacy

- A. In concurrence with Administrative Procedure 119 and applicable laws, Fire/EMS Department personnel have an obligation to protect information concerning the Department and members of the public. Therefore, personnel's social media use shall not disclose or lead to the unauthorized disclosure of any personally identifiable information of a citizen that has received Fire/EMS Department service. This includes, but is not limited to, photos, video, audio, and or posts relating to incident scenes, patient care or information, inside private residences or where personal property is visible, and other confidential or private information.

III. Prohibitions and Responsibilities

- A. Employees and members are prohibited from posting or publishing statements, opinions or information that might reasonably be interpreted as discriminatory, harassing, defamatory, or violent, as they may place the Department in disrepute or negatively impact the ability of the Department to carry out its mission.
- B. The use of features on electronic devices that record video, audio and visual imagery is strictly prohibited on emergency scenes unless authorized by the Fire Chief through the chain-of-command. (This restriction does not apply to the use of cell phones for quick internet access to information such as medical protocols or drug information.)
- C. It is expected that an employee or member's social media activity will not violate the public's trust of the Fire/EMS Department and would not be perceived as an act which is beyond the common decency of a public servant. As public servants, all employees and members of the Fire/EMS Department shall exercise a high degree of caution when posting material on social media, particularly when the user identifies or otherwise affiliates with the Department through graphics, logos, or statements in their content, profile, or account.
- D. Personnel are fully accountable for understanding the rules of information sharing within the social media platforms they use.
- E. Any social media activity conducted in a manner that reveals an employee or member's position of the Department may be evaluated for compliance with existing Departmental policies and procedures. This includes any content "liked," posted, forwarded or reposted.



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

- F. Personnel are permitted to post photos/videos which include Fire/EMS Department uniforms and logos in certain, limited contexts, such as retirement celebrations or graduations. Employees and members must ensure that these photos do not depict any perceived unprofessionalism, consumption of drugs and alcohol, or any act that would undermine the image and mission of the Fire/EMS Department.
- G. The creation of social media sites or groups related to any internal work unit, social or interest group bearing the County or Fire/EMS Department's name or seal are strictly prohibited unless authorized by the Fire Chief or County Executive. Prince George's County Code, §1-107.
- H. Employees and members of the Prince George's County Fire/EMS Department are obligated to report any social media activity by any employee or member that violates this policy. If an employee or member is found in violation of this policy, they could be subject to disciplinary action.
- I. This policy does not apply to social media activities undertaken by a member of the Fire Investigations Unit, Internal Affairs, or Office of Professional Standards during the course of a legitimate criminal or administrative investigation, or in the course of intelligence collection efforts, related to public safety or potential criminal activity. This exception shall include those occasions on which a member must create and/or use a fictitious social media account, user profile, avatar or similar form of online identification for legitimate investigation purposes.

REFERENCES

Administrative Procedure 119, Prince George's County Government.

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

Code of Ethics, Prince George's County Fire/EMS Department.

Constitution of the United States, Amendment I.

FORMS / ATTACHMENTS

N/A