

	ROFR Section: 107		TFCA Best Practices:	
	Effective: 1/2013	Revision:	Fire Chief: 	

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

I. POLICY

Social media provides a new and potentially valuable means of assisting the Department and its personnel in meeting community outreach, problem-solving, investigative, crime prevention, and related objectives. The Department recognizes the role that these tools play in the personal lives of some Departmental personnel; however, this requires careful use of this technology to ensure that inappropriate messages are not conveyed. Professionalism, ethics, and integrity are of paramount importance in the law enforcement community. To achieve and maintain the public's highest level of respect, we must place reasonable restrictions on our conduct and appearance, and hold to these standards of conduct whether on or off duty. An employee's action must never bring the Department into disrepute, nor should conduct be detrimental to its efficient operation.

II. PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this policy is to establish written guidelines for disseminating photographic, written, verbal, and video information regarding official action or activity via social networking mediums, which include but are not limited to:
 - a. Personal mobile phone texting
 - b. Social networking internet sites (i.e. Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, etc.)
 - c. Personal website blogging

2. Due to the increased scrutiny of Fire employee posts to social networking sites by opposing attorneys, the Department strongly encourages employees to refrain from posting information regarding off-duty activities that may tend to bring your reputation into question, even if the posted information is taken out of context. Employees should consider the possible adverse consequences to posting this type of information such as:
 - Cross-examination in criminal and/or civil cases
 - Future advancement within the Department
 - Future outside employment opportunities

- Public and private embarrassment

III. DEFINITIONS

Blog: A self-published diary or commentary on a particular topic that may allow visitors to post responses, reactions, or comments. The term is short for “Web log.”

Page: The specific portion of a social media website where content is displayed, and managed by an individual or individuals with administrator rights.

Post: Content an individual shares on a social media site or the act of publishing content on a site.

Profile: Information that a user provides about himself or herself on a social networking site.

Social Media: A category of Internet-based resources that integrate user-generated content and user participation. This includes, but is not limited to, social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace), microblogging sites (Twitter, Nixle), photo- and video-sharing sites (Flickr, YouTube), wikis (Wikipedia), blogs, and news sites (Digg, Reddit).

Social Networks: Online platforms where users can create profiles, share information, and socialize with others using a range of technologies.

Speech: Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, videotape, or related forms of communication.

Web 2.0: The second generation of the World Wide Web focused on shareable, user-generated content, rather than static web pages. Some use this term interchangeably with social media.

Wiki: Web page(s) that can be edited collaboratively.

IV. PROCEDURES

1. When using social networking sites, employees must use appropriate discretion in the use of references to the City of Red Oak or the Red Oak Fire Rescue so as not to discredit or disrespect the City or Department. Posting sensitive information on the internet could impact officer and public safety. Employees should exercise good judgment and demonstrate personal accountability when choosing to participate on social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc.

V. PROCEDURES

- A. Precautions and Prohibitions

Barring State law to the contrary, Department personnel shall abide by the following when using social media.

1. Department personnel 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. As public employees, department personnel are cautioned that speech on- or off-duty, made pursuant to their official duties—that is, that owes its existence to the employee's professional duties and responsibilities—is not protected speech under the First Amendment and may form the basis for discipline if deemed detrimental to the department. Department personnel should assume that their speech and related activity on social media sites will reflect upon their office and this department.
3. Department personnel shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any information to which they have access as a result of their employment without written permission from the Fire Chief or his or her designee.
4. For safety and security reasons, department personnel are cautioned not to disclose their employment with this department nor shall they post information pertaining to any other member of the department without their permission. As such, department personnel are cautioned not to do the following:
 - a. Display department logos, uniforms, or similar identifying items on personal web pages.
 - b. Post personal photographs or provide similar means of personal recognition that may cause them to be identified as a employee of this department. Personell who are, or who may reasonably be expected to work in undercover operations, shall not post any form of visual or personal identification.
5. When using social media, department personnel should be mindful that their speech becomes part of the worldwide electronic domain. Therefore, adherence to the department's code of conduct is required in the personal use of social media. In particular, department personnel 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 personnel reflecting behavior that would reasonably be considered reckless or irresponsible.

6. Engaging in prohibited speech noted herein, may provide grounds for undermining or impeaching an officer's testimony in criminal proceedings. Department personnel thus sanctioned are subject to discipline up to and including termination of office.
7. Department personnel may not divulge information gained by reason of their authority; 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.
8. Department personnel should be aware that they may be subject to civil litigation for:
 - a. publishing or posting false information that harms the reputation of another person, group, or organization (defamation);
 - b. publishing or posting private facts and personal information about someone without their permission that has not been previously revealed to the public, is not of legitimate public concern, and would be offensive to a reasonable person;
 - c. using someone else's name, likeness, or other personal attributes without that person's permission for an exploitative purpose; or
 - d. publishing the creative work of another, trademarks, or certain confidential business information without the permission of the owner.
9. Department personnel should be aware that privacy settings and social media sites are constantly in flux, and they should never assume that personal information posted on such sites is protected.
10. Department personnel 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.
11. Reporting violations—Any employee 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 his or her supervisor immediately for follow-up action.
12. Employees shall treat all official Fire Rescue business as confidential.
13. Employees who obtain information in the course of performing their duties or from other employees shall not release to persons outside the Department, either directly or indirectly, that information except by Departmental policy or written authorization from the Fire Chief. Information prohibited from being released includes but is not limited to criminal offenses, crashes, or violations of

ordinances or statutes.

14. Employees shall not post any material on the internet that brings discredit to or may adversely affect the efficiency or integrity of Red Oak Fire Rescue.
15. Employee postings or websites deemed inappropriate or which promote misconduct, whether on or off duty, and which bring discredit to this Department or the City, may be investigated through a criminal or administrative investigation. This includes being “tagged” on pictures in which possibly bring discredit to the organization.

