



Vicksburg Mississippi

Dissemination of Harmful Information Policy

1. PURPOSE

The City of Vicksburg is committed to protecting employee dignity, preserving public trust, and maintaining effective and professional operations across all City departments. The purpose of this policy is to establish clear standards governing the creation, sharing, and dissemination of information by City employees to prevent the spread of unverified, knowingly false, confidential, harmful, or malicious information that may undermine workplace harmony and disrupt City operations.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all City of Vicksburg personnel, including but not limited to full-time and part-time employees, seasonal employees, and interns. This policy applies when individuals are on duty or performing City-related functions, representing the City, using City-owned equipment, or engaging in off-duty conduct that reasonably impacts workplace effectiveness, employee relations, or public confidence in City operations. Nothing in this policy is intended to restrict lawful, constitutionally, protected speech.

3. DEFINITIONS

Harmful: information or content that causes injury, loss, or disadvantage, promotes suicide, self-harm, eating disorders, substance abuse, stalking, bullying, sexual exploitation, incites violence, harassing or material detrimental to another person.

Improper Dissemination of Information: the sharing or repeating of *unverified, private, or derogatory information* regarding City of Vicksburg personnel or operations where such dissemination reasonably undermines operational effectiveness, confidentiality, employee safety, or public trust.

Malicious Information: Knowingly false statements or communications made with intent of harming an employee's reputation, safety or the City of Vicksburg.

Protected reporting: Good-faith reporting of misconduct, unlawful behavior, policy violations, discrimination, harassment, retaliation, or safety concerns.

4. POLICY STATEMENT

City personnel are expected to communicate responsibly, professionally, and truthfully in all workplace communications. All City personnel are prohibited from creating, sharing, or amplifying unverified, private, or derogatory information regarding City personnel, City business, or City operations. Protected reporting is not a violation. This policy targets conduct, not viewpoint. The sharing of malicious and harmful information which constitutes improper dissemination of information is strictly prohibited

5. EXAMPLES OF IMPROPER DISSEMINATION (NON-EXHAUSTIVE):

Conduct that may constitute improper dissemination under this policy includes, but is not limited to:

- a) Creating, sharing, forwarding, or amplifying rumors, gossip, or unverified information regarding personnel matters, investigations, or operations.
- b) Creating, sharing, forwarding, or amplifying knowingly false information.
- c) Using City of Vicksburg email, messaging, or social media to circulate unverified or knowingly false information.
- d) Sharing confidential or private information, including personnel records or releasing private identifying information which reasonably could be expected to be confidential.
- e) Making or spreading malicious statements intended to damage an employee's reputation, safety, or professional standing.
- f) Retaliating against any individual for making a report, filing a grievance, or participating in an investigation.

Important: Protected reporting of misconduct is explicitly safeguarded and does not constitute improper dissemination.

REPORTING, INVESTIGATION, AND CONFIDENTIALITY

1. **Reporting:** Alleged violations may be reported to a supervisor, department head, division head, or Human Resources Director. Upon notice of a violation of this policy, the supervisor or department head shall notify the Division Head. The Division Head shall notify the Human Resources Director immediately. If the supervisor or department head is notified of an alleged violation after regular business hours, the Human Resources Director should be notified on the next business day. Employees may report violations directly to the Human Resources

Director. The Human Resources Director shall ensure any report is reviewed and an investigation is initiated. For the purposes of this policy, any violation reported to the Human Resources Director shall be deemed reported upon receipt of a written statement; however oral reports shall be accepted and addressed pending written documentation. Any complaints involving the Human Resources Director must be reported to the Mayor who will appoint a representative to conduct an investigation.

2. **Investigation:** Any complaints of violations of this policy shall be investigated promptly, impartially as follows:
 - a. The Human Resources Director or assigned investigator shall conduct an interview with individual(s) who have direct knowledge of the alleged violation of this policy and review supporting evidence, if provided. Based on the initial interview intake and assessment, possible next steps may include, but are not limited to:
 - Gathering further information, including obtaining a list of witnesses and interviewing those witnesses, before deciding next steps.
 - Taking no action.
 - Referring the violation to the Board of Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Vicksburg for further handling.
 - b. The employee alleged to have violated this policy will be notified in writing of the investigation with said written notification to include the allegations of misconduct being investigated. The employee will be provided with an opportunity to give a statement and provide supporting evidence and a list of witnesses.
 - c. After the investigation has been completed, the Human Resources Director or assigned investigator will make a recommendation regarding the resolution of the violation. If warranted, proposed recommended disciplinary action against the offender could range from no action to possible termination depending on the severity of the complaint.
3. **Confidentiality and Non-Retaliation:** Information related to complaints and investigations will be handled confidentially to the extent permitted. Retaliation is strictly prohibited and subject to discipline.

DISCIPLINE

Violations of this Dissemination of Information policy will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. Disciplinary

measures shall be applied as follows:

- a. First Offense: Written Reprimand
- b. Second Offense: Suspension
- c. Third Offense: Termination

There will be zero tolerance for malicious, defamatory, or safety-impacting conduct.

The Board of Mayor and Aldermen reserves the right to impose harsher penalties including immediate termination when the nature or severity of the violation warrants such action, regardless of prior disciplinary history and even if it is a first offense.

TRAINING

The City of Vicksburg recognizes that effective training is essential to ensuring consistent understanding and enforcement of this policy. The Human Resources Department shall provide training on this policy:

1. At the time of hire or onboarding for all City personnel;
2. Periodically, as determined by the Human Resources Director, when updates to the policy occur or when additional guidance is necessary;
3. Upon request of a Division Head when workplace issues, repeated incidents, or trends indicate a need for clarification or corrective training; and
4. The Board of Mayor and Aldermen may require remedial training for any departments, division head, department head, supervisory personnel, or employee at any time.

ENFORCEMENT

Division Heads and Department Heads are responsible for reinforcing this policy, identifying potential issues, documenting occurrences, and consulting with Human Resources to rectify any issues immediately. Division Heads and Department Heads are also required to appear before the Board of Mayor or Aldermen for a hearing regarding any violation that warrants the suspension or termination of an employee.