

**VICKSBURG POLICE DEPARTMENT**  
**Law Enforcement**  
**Policies and Procedures**

<b>Subject: Social Networking</b>	<b>Policy Number: 3.21</b>
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<b>Approval Authority Title and Signature:</b> <b>The Board of Mayor and Aldermen, Police Chief Larry Burns</b>	

## **POLICY**

Employees of the Vicksburg Police Department are held to high standards of conduct and are expected to adhere to these standards both on and off duty. This includes employees' participation in "social networking" on internet websites or other social networking sites. Social networking can be useful for personal and professional networking and communication. However, due to the pervasive and permanent nature of information posted on the internet, exercise of a high degree of discretion is essential to ensure the protection of the Department and its employees. Employees shall not engage in posting any material which reflects negatively on any other City employee or official, this Department or the law enforcement profession, or which could compromise any investigation or the prosecution of any case.

## **PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

1. To establish a policy concerning personal web pages or internet sites and to ensure employees' exercise of appropriate discretion so as to not discredit the Vicksburg Police Department.
2. To clearly identify prohibited activities by Vicksburg Police Department employees on social networking or other sites, both on and off duty.
3. To provide guidelines for officers in applying rules of conduct to their online content.
4. To protect the Department and employees from harm as the result of inappropriate postings or inadvertent harmful postings.
5. To maintain order and discipline within the Department, ensure efficient operations, maintain community trust and respect and efficient use of social media for community engagement and public information.
6. To engage and interact with the community, provide relevant and timely community news, information and events, distribute crime prevention and

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## Law Enforcement Policies and Procedures, 3.21 Social Networking

public safety tips, to urgently notify the public of critical incidents which may affect citizens, business owners and visitors of the City of Vicksburg and those having an interest in the City of Vicksburg.

7. To place reasonable restrictions on employees' online conduct, both on and off duty.
8. To prevent the release, either directly or indirectly, of information concerning law violations, accidents, internal investigations, Departmental policies and procedures, or other Departmental records to unauthorized persons outside the Department and to ensure that all employees treat as confidential the official business of the Department.
9. This policy applies to official Vicksburg Police Department social media accounts as well as employees' personal accounts when the accountholder identifies on social media as an employee of the Vicksburg Police Department, when the employee is using the Vicksburg Police Department's resources or when the employee is in his/her official Vicksburg Police Department's uniform, or when the employee's off duty social media conduct reasonably affects workplace harmony, discipline or public trust.

## DEFINITIONS

Social networking site: Any web-based service that allows individuals to do the following:

1. Construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system;
2. Articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection;
3. View and navigate their list of connections and those made by others within the system;
4. A site that provides a virtual community for people interested in a particular subject to:
  - a. Virtually assemble;
  - b. Create their own online "profile" with biographical data, pictures, likes, dislikes, and any other information they choose to post; and
  - c. Communicate with each other by voice, chat, instant message, video conference, and blogs.

The service typically provides a way for members to contact friends of other members. These include all types of postings on the Internet, including but not limited to social networking sites such as Facebook©, MySpace©, or LinkedIn©; blogs and other online journals and diaries; bulletin boards and chat rooms; micro-blogging such as Twitter©; and the posting of video on YouTube© and similar media.

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## Law Enforcement Policies and Procedures, 3.21 Social Networking

Blog or web-log: A personal online journal which is frequently updated and intended for general public consumption. Blogs are defined by their format, a series of entries posted to a single page in reverse chronological order. Blogs generally represent the personality of the author or reflect the purpose of the host website. Topics may include opinion or commentary on internet, social, or personal issues and may include links to other sites favored by the author, particularly those supporting or rejecting a point being made on a post.

Chat room: Web site where users actively e-mail back and forth in a group setting. It may or may not be password-protected.

Personal web site: Website created or configured by an individual for social or entertainment purposes. Examples include personal pages in Facebook®, MySpace®, or LinkedIn®. It would not include file transfer protocol (ftp) sites or sites used only for online file storage or backup.

Website: Any computerized document, file, or menu accessible on the internet.

## PROCEDURE

Employees who engage in social networking website(s) should be mindful that postings, even if done off premises and while off duty, could have an adverse effect on the Vicksburg Police Department. Participation in publicly accessible internet postings, blogs, chat rooms, electronic dating services, buy-sell-trade sites, and similar websites should be carefully considered for proper personal conduct. **Failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.**

Following are policies that should be observed when engaging in social networking.

### I. DEPARTMENT-SANCTIONED SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

A. Only employees authorized by the Chief of Police or the Chief's authorized designee can post or manage social networking websites on behalf of the Department.

Authorized members shall use only department-approved equipment during the normal course of duties to post and monitor department-related social media, unless they are specifically authorized to do otherwise by administration.

B. The Chief of Police or his/her designee(s) may develop specific guidelines identifying the type of content that may be posted. Any content that does not strictly conform to the guidelines should be approved by the Chief of Police or his/her designee(s) prior to posting. Requests to post information over department social

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## Law Enforcement Policies and Procedures, 3.21 Social Networking

media by members who are not authorized to post should be made through the member's chain of command.

- C. Only content that is appropriate for public release, that supports the department mission and conforms to all department policies regarding the release of information may be posted.
- D. The Vicksburg Police Department social networking pages and sites shall clearly indicate that they are being maintained by the Vicksburg Police Department and must display the Department's phone number and address.
- E. Social networking is subject to all Departmental and City Policies, including but not limited to the following:
  - 1. Canons of Police Ethics;
  - 2. Professional Conduct;
  - 3. Rules of Conduct;
  - 4. Insubordination;
  - 5. Discipline;
  - 6. Internet Use;
  - 7. Workplace Harassment;
  - 8. Employee and Confidential Records; and
  - 9. Off-duty Conduct.

## II. OFFICIAL DEPARTMENT SOCIAL MEDIA USE

- A. Vicksburg Police Department employees authorized to represent the Department by posting on social networking sites shall:
  - 1. Identify themselves as an employee of the Department.
  - 2. Conduct themselves at all times as a representative of the Department and adhere to all Department standards of conduct, and observe conventional accepted protocols and proper decorum.
  - 3. Not make statements about the guilt or innocence of any suspect or arrestee, or comments concerning pending prosecutions, nor post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate confidential information, including photographs or videos, related to department training, activities, or work-related assignments without authorization or express permission.
  - 4. Not conduct political activities or private business.

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## Law Enforcement Policies and Procedures, 3.21 Social Networking

- B. Official access/posting of comments to any non-Department social media or social networking site is prohibited other than when necessary in the furtherance of official duty.
- C. Only authorized employees may post on the Department's social networking sites. Any posted content must be factual, non-partisan, and approved per the City of Vicksburg's Human Resources and Police Department's procedures. Any authorized employee(s) who posts on the Department's social networking sites must maintain records of the social networking posts and approvals from the Chief and his/her designee.
- D. Authorized employees can use social networking sites for investigative leads only under procedures approved by the Vicksburg Police Department to preserve the chain of custody and document searches and downloads.
- E. Employee must maintain professionalism online and avoid language or images that undermine the public's confidence or the Department's mission.
- F. Responses to requests for references, information, or recommendations shall be handled through conventional mail or e-mail. Responses to such requests will not be made through social networking.

### III. ON-DUTY AND OFF DUTY SOCIAL MEDIA USE

- A. Vicksburg Police Department employees shall not utilize Department owned computers, cell phones, or other communicative devices for any unauthorized purpose, including participation in social media or social networking sites, unless such conduct is required and authorized in the course of a permitted duty assignment.
- B. The Department reserves the right to monitor employees' social networking activities upon a complaint of a violation of Department policy and to take such action as may be necessary to protect the Department and its employees. The Department also reserves the right to compel disclosure of participation in social networking sites by applicants seeking employment with the Department and applicants may be compelled to provide the Department with access to their site as part of their background investigation.

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- C. Employees' use of the City's local area network (LAN) is subject to the City of Vicksburg's Information Technology Use and Security Policy, which permits only "occasional non-business research or browsing during meal time or other breaks, or outside of work hours provided that all other usage policies are adhered to and the employee has obtained permission from his or her supervisor".
- D. Employees may not use or authorize or cause to be used any Vicksburg Police logos, graphics, or photographs of Vicksburg Police Department premises, uniforms, badges, patrol cars, crime scenes, evidence, weapons, or any other equipment without the express consent of the Chief of Police. Employees cannot post any body-worn camera footage or personnel records.
- E. Employees seeking approval to use references to the Vicksburg Police Department or photographs/depictions of police department uniforms, badges, patches, marked units, graphics, etc., on internet web pages will submit a request in the form of a memorandum to the Chief of Police. The memorandum shall include the following:
  - 1 A description of the proposed usage of the reference, photograph, or depiction;
  - 2 The purpose of the web site or posting; and
  - 3 A printed layout of the entire web page, posting, or site, if available.
- F. Employee must maintain professionalism online and avoid language or images that undermine the public's confidence or the Department's mission.
- G. Employees must not engage in harassment or make any threats to anyone or conduct political campaigning while identifying as a Vicksburg Police Department employee or while wearing uniforms.
- H. Responses to requests for references, information, or recommendations shall be handled through conventional mail or e-mail. Responses to such requests will not be made through social networking.
- I. Employees shall not disclose personal or contact information or post photographs of co-workers or supervisors without their permission unless pictures are taken when the employee is working in his or her official

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## Law Enforcement Policies and Procedures, 3.21 Social Networking

capacity. Employees should not post any medical, disciplinary, personnel or confidential investigative information unless authorized and approved by the Human Resources Department and Chief of Police.

- J. Employees shall not defame or otherwise discredit the Vicksburg Police Department with detrimental remarks about supervisors or other employees. Such conduct could be considered conduct unbecoming or could constitute insubordination and subject the employee(s) to disciplinary action.
- K. Employees with a complaint or grievance against any other employee or supervisor shall utilize established procedures for redress set forth in the City of Vicksburg Personnel Rules and Regulations and the Board of Civil Service Commission of the City of Vicksburg Rules and Regulations.
- L. Employees shall refrain from posting messages or pictures which depict the Vicksburg Police Department in an unfavorable light or which discredit or impugn the integrity of any other City employee or official. Employees shall not represent themselves as an employee of the Department in a public forum with any information, opinion, or posture that would tend to discredit or reflect unfavorably upon the employee, the Department, or any other City employee or official.
- M. Employees shall not post messages, pictures, audio, video, or other postings relating to past or ongoing investigations or to criminal or civil proceedings in which any City employee or official is a party or witness, or to any law enforcement-related action taken by any employee of this Department. Likewise, posts pertaining to Departmental policies, practices, personnel, or activities are not appropriate. Such postings could compromise judicial proceedings and/or expose the Department or employee to civil liability.
- N. Any information posted by an employee could legally be accessed by outside parties through discovery processes or by illegal hacking. Embarrassing, inappropriate, or other information could be utilized to impeach or discredit an officer's courtroom testimony. Such postings include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - 1 Sexually explicit, violent, racial, ethnically derogatory material, offensive comments, pictures, artwork, or video;

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- 2 Photographic poses which glorify violence or weaponry;
- 3 Photos of officers in social situations abusing alcohol;
- 4 Any comments about use of force; and
- 5 Comments about personal or Departmental statistics, arrests, or citations.

O. Employees shall not post any messages, materials, or images which involve racial or cultural insensitivity, nudity, obscenity, vulgarity, or which depict, encourage, or promote unlawful conduct or activity.

P. Employees should be mindful that posting personal information, such as home address, phone numbers, family members' names or photos, and children's schools or other activities pose a security risk to officers and family members. It is recommended that employees refrain from posting any such information on social networking sites. Privacy settings should be set to restrict access only to pre-determined family and friends. However, these settings are not foolproof and hackers or criminals with sufficient expertise and equipment can defeat privacy settings and gain access to personal information.

Q. Employees may not use or authorize or cause to be used any Vicksburg Police logos, graphics, or photographs of Vicksburg Police Department premises, uniforms, badges, patrol cars, crime scenes, evidence, weapons, or any other equipment without the express consent of the Chief of Police.

R. The Chief of Police or his designee may approve, disapprove, or make further inquiries by noting such on the request. If approved, the requester will retain a copy of the approval for the duration of the posting or website. Within the limits of his/her control, the requester will be responsible for removal of references, photographs, or depictions when the posting of the website is no longer appropriate or when directed by the Chief or his designee.

#### **IV. PROHIBITED CONTENT**

The following information shall not be released via any form of social media or internet website without the express written authorization of the Chief of Police unless the Chief has designated an employee to release this information:

A. The existence and/or identity of a suspect prior to arrest, except to

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the extent authorized and necessary to aid in the investigation, or to assist in a suspect's apprehension, or to warn the public of potential danger.

- B. Information which could lead to the discovery of the identity or address of a juvenile offender, except as authorized by law.
- C. Active details about a pending criminal case or closed criminal case.
- D. Statements concerning the character, reputation, and/or guilt of an accused person.
- E. Any personnel files of any City of Vicksburg employee or medical information of any City of Vicksburg employee or any disciplinary records of any City of Vicksburg employee;
- F. The past criminal record of an accused person unless to warn the public of potential danger.
- G. The names of victims of sexual assault or child molestation.
- H. Any information about a crime which would be known only to the person(s) responsible for the crime.
- I. Any information that contains doxxing, threats, harassing content or any discriminatory content.
- J. Any Political endorsements or campaign activity while identifying as a Vicksburg Police Department employee or in uniform.
- K. Impersonating the Department or creating unauthorized official Vicksburg Police Department accounts.

**V. REPORTING AND ENFORCEMENT**

- A. Employees are to immediately report any violations of this policy to the Internal Affairs Department or the employee's supervisor immediately. Employees are allowed to submit anonymous reports.

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B. Employees violating this policy will be subjected to the following disciplinary action depending on the nature of his/her violation: counseling, referral for training, written reprimand, suspension or termination depending on the severity. The Chief of Police will take immediate action for any disclosures or reports of the violation of this policy that endanger the safety of others or compromise the criminal investigation.

C. An employee's good faith reporting of misconduct is protected and not a policy violation.

## **VI. TRAINING AND OVERSIGHT**

A. All Vicksburg Police Department employees shall receive mandatory social medial training upon his/her hiring. That this policy shall be reviewed annually.

B. The Human Resources Department or an authorized Vicksburg Police Department employee will oversee the official Vicksburg Police Department social networking sites and accounts, approve content and keep a social networking posting log.

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