

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

<b>Subject: Social Networking</b>	<b>Policy Number: 3.21</b>
<b>Issue Date: February 6, 2012</b>	<b>Revision Date:</b>
<b>Approval Authority Title and Signature: The Board of Mayor and Aldermen, Police Chief Walter Armstrong</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 maintain their First Amendment rights, but any speech or expression, even in a personal capacity, causing disruption or that undermines the effectiveness and/or operation of the Department is prohibited. 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

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- operations, and maintain community trust and respect.
6. To place reasonable restrictions on employees' online conduct, both on and off duty.
  7. 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.

## 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®, Instagram®, Snapchat®, 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.

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.

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

1. Social networking is subject to all Departmental and City Policies, including but not limited to the following:
  - a. Canons of Police Ethics;
  - b. Professional Conduct;
  - c. Rules of Conduct;
  - d. Insubordination;
  - e. Discipline;
  - f. Internet Use;
  - g. Workplace Harassment;
  - h. Employee and Confidential Records; and
  - i. Off-duty Conduct.
2. Employees' use of the City's local area network (LAN) is subject to the City of Vicksburg's Information Technology Use and Security Policy, and therefore, use of the City's information technologies services shall be used for City business purposes only.
3. 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.
4. Employees seeking approval to use references to the Vicksburg Police

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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:

- a. A description of the proposed usage of the reference, photograph, or depiction;
  - b. The purpose of the web site or posting; and
  - c. A printed layout of the entire web page, posting, or site, if available.
5. 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.
  6. 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.
  7. Employees shall not disclose personal or contact information or post photographs of co-workers or supervisors without their permission.
  8. 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. 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.
  9. 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.
  10. 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

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- 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.
11. 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:
    - a. Sexually explicit, violent, racial, ethnically derogatory material, offensive comments, pictures, artwork, or video;
    - b. Photographic poses which glorify violence or weaponry;
    - c. Photos of officers in social situations abusing alcohol;
    - d. Any comments about use of force; and
    - e. Comments about personal or Departmental statistics, arrests, or citations.
  12. Employees shall not post any messages, materials, or images that is discriminatory, harassing or physically threatening or which involve racial or cultural insensitivity, nudity, obscenity, vulgarity, or which depict, encourage, or promote unlawful conduct or activity.
  13. 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.
  14. 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.
  15. Failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

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