

Vicksburg Fire Department

Social Networking Policy

Policy

Employees of the Vicksburg Fire 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 fire and EMS professions, or which could compromise any emergency scene or investigation.

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 Fire Department.
2. To clearly identify prohibited activities by Vicksburg Fire Department employees on social networking or other sites, both on and off duty.
3. To provide guidelines for employees 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, 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 patient care, fire or other emergency scenes, Department policies and guidelines, 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 sites: 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 rejected a point being made on a post.

Chat room: Web site where users actively email 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®, Instagram®, Snapchat®, 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 Fire

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. 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 Fire logos, graphics, or photographs of Vicksburg Fire Department premises, uniforms, badges, vehicles, emergency scenes, or any other equipment without the express consent of the Fire Chief.
4. Employees seeking approval to use references to the Vicksburg Fire Department or photographs/depictions of fire department uniforms, badges, patches, graphics, etc., on internet web pages will submit a request in the form of a memorandum to the Fire Chief. The memorandum shall include:
 - 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 Fire Chief 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 email. 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 Fire Department with detrimental remarks about supervisors, elected officials, 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 Fire 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 a 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 emergency scenes or responses, on-duty employees in the work environment, past or ongoing investigations or to criminal or civil proceedings in which any City employee or official is a party or witness. Likewise, posts pertaining to Departmental policies, practices, personnel, or activities are not appropriate. Such postings could expose the Department to civil liability.
11. 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, drug or alcohol abuse, or which depict, encourage, or promote unlawful conduct or activity. Additionally, employees should refrain from “liking” or sharing posts or subject matter that promotes or encourages unlawful conduct, drug or alcohol abuse, cultural insensitivity, or ethically derogatory material.
12. 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 employees and their 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 to only to family and friends. However, these settings are not foolproof.
13. 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 sites(s) as part of their background check.
14. Failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.