



CHATHAM COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

**SOP # ADM-019 SOCIAL
NETWORKING AND INTERNET USE**

EFFECTIVE: 09/23/20

REVISION: 08/30/23

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for the personal use of the internet and other electronic communications media by employees of the Chatham County Police Department (CCPD). This Policy is written to address the growing use of internet sites such as Facebook, Myspace, etc., as an accepted form of private, semi-private and public communication and comment. Generically such sites are referred to as social networking sites. This policy is specifically intended to apply to such sites, but is equally applicable to other internet and electronic communications media, including but not limited to internet chat rooms, internet forums, Usenet, Twitter, texting, comments posted on online newspaper sites, etc.

POLICY

It is the policy of the CCPD to acknowledge that employees have the right to maintain personal web pages and/or sites, through the use of the internet and other electronic communications media, and to encourage employees to exercise that right to the extent possible without causing a detrimental impact on the Department, a decline in public confidence and respect for the Department or the employee as a member of the Department. As such, the Department imposes restrictions and oversight when direct or indirect reference to the Department or its employees is made within these forums. Therefore, all employees of the CCPD are required to adhere to the procedures and guidelines outlined in this policy.

PROCEDURE

I. ON-DUTY CONDUCT

- A. Employees of this agency are prohibited from using agency computers or other agency electronic devices for any personal or otherwise unauthorized purpose, including, but not limited to, accessing the internet or communicating through it for personal purposes.
- B. Employees of this agency are prohibited from disseminating information in any manner that is harmful to the image, mission or functioning of the CCPD. Such information includes, but is not limited to, the following:
 - 1. Photographs/images relating to any investigation (active or closed) by this agency (must have agency approval via the signature of the Assistant Chief or Chief of Police, prior to any dissemination),
 - 2. Video or audio files related to any investigation (active or closed) by this agency (must have agency approval via the signature of the Assistant Chief or Chief of Police, prior to any dissemination),
 - 3. Documents that are the property of CCPD, and

4. Opinions about the CCPD and its operations or personnel that could adversely affect the ability of CCPD to perform its law enforcement function.
- C. Employees are allowed to post personal photos, videos, or other media which contain logos, badges, seals, uniforms, vehicles, equipment or any item or symbol that is affiliated with the CCPD that will not be harmful to the image, mission or functioning of CCPD or Chatham County.
1. Employees are reminded that when posting these types of items to social networking sites or sending them through other electronic communications they should use caution.
 2. In the event an employee posts an item that may be considered sensitive in nature, offensive, or inappropriate, the employee may be asked to remove the posting.
 3. Any complaints received in response to a posting through electronic means will be investigated and the employee may be subject to disciplinary action.
- D. Employees of the CCPD are prohibited from using the internet or any other electronic communications medium to harass, annoy, embarrass, belittle or oppress any other person. This prohibition applies to both on-duty and off-duty conduct.

II. PERSONALLY OWNED EQUIPMENT

- A. All photographic, audio and video data recorded, collected, captured, or stored by an officer during his tour of duty, that are related to official business of Chatham County, the officer's specific duty or duties, is the property of the CCPD. This paragraph applies equally to departmental and privately owned equipment.
- B. Officers will ensure that all digitally obtained data collected as evidence, or that has or may have evidentiary value, is treated, collected, stored, and documented as evidence. Once such data has been properly saved and logged as evidence, it will not be stored on personally owned equipment or in any manner other than that in which other hard, non-digital evidence is logged, stored and maintained.
- C. The digitally obtained evidence described above will not be forwarded or provided in any manner to any person, with the exception of the Office of the District Attorney or the Office of the County Attorney, without the approval of a Division Commander, Assistant Chief of Police or the Chief of Police. The release or forwarding of photographic, audio and/or video data to the District Attorney's and/or County Attorney's Office upon request is permitted.
- D. Personally owned equipment capable of collecting photographic, audio or video data may itself be considered evidence if such equipment is used to obtain, create or store evidentiary photographic, audio or video data. Such equipment and its contents may be inspected, seized, or held as evidence as necessary.

III. OFF-DUTY CONDUCT

- A. Employees of this agency who utilize the internet and/or other electronic communication media in their off-duty time are required to maintain a level of professionalism and conduct consistent with this policy, all other Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) of this department, and otherwise appropriate to their positions. Employees are prohibited from broadcasting or publishing data that is, or in a manner that is, detrimental to the image, mission or functioning of the department.

- B. Employees are allowed to post personal photos, videos, or other media which contain logos, badges, seals, uniforms, vehicles, equipment or any item or symbol that is affiliated with the CCPD that will not be harmful to the image, mission or functioning of CCPD or Chatham County.
 - 1. Employees are reminded that when posting these types of items to social networking sites or sending them through other electronic communications they should use caution.
 - 2. In the event an employee posts an item that may be considered sensitive in nature, offensive, or inappropriate, the employee may be asked to remove the posting.
 - 3. Any complaints received in response to a posting through electronic means will be investigated and the employee may be subject to disciplinary action.
- C. Employees are prohibited from using the internet or other electronic communication media to post any materials that:
 - 1. are of a sexually graphic nature,
 - 2. promote violence or weaponry, or
 - 3. are detrimental to the mission and function of this agency.
- D. Employees of this agency are prohibited from using their title or any other reference to this agency in any correspondence or other form of publishing for personal purposes without prior approval of the department. This prohibition includes traditional as well as electronic and digital media. It specifically includes, but is not limited to, e-mails, internet postings, internet chat rooms, internet forums, blogs, twitter accounts, and social networking sites. This prohibition includes signature lines in personal e-mail accounts and personal email addresses, though an employee may seek agency approval for such.

IV. NEW EMPLOYEES

- A. All candidates seeking employment with this agency are required to list their membership and participation in social networking sites. The candidate will also provide the agency with access to his/her site(s) as part of a required background investigation, if requested. No decisions to employ will be made based on the thoughts and opinions expressed by the applicant in social networking sites reviewed pursuant to this Policy. Candidates seeking employment must agree to remove such material if the same is in violation of this Policy.

V. ADMINISTRATIVE INVESTIGATIONS

- A. Employees who are subject to administrative investigations may be ordered to provide the agency with access to all their internet accounts when the subject of the investigation is directly, narrowly, and specifically related to the employee's performance or ability to perform his or her function within the agency or when the subject of the investigation is potentially adverse to the operation, morale, or efficiency of the agency.

VI. PRIVACY

- A. Employees are reminded that they may be jeopardizing the safety and security of themselves and others, **including their family members and co-workers**, by publishing photographs or personal information on the internet or other electronic communications media. Such publication may also jeopardize and/or compromise ongoing or future investigations. In addition, employees are advised that, in the event information has been posted on the internet or other electronic communications media identifying an individual as a police officer, the posting could make them ineligible for specialized positions where anonymity is required.

BY ORDER OF:

Electronically Signed in PowerDMS on 08/30/2023

Jeffrey M. Hadley
Chief of Police