

DOUGLAS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE		Policy and Procedure
Specific Policies		P&P-B-127
Internet Social Networking and Personal Websites		
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I. PURPOSE

The Douglas County Sheriff's Office works to build community trust and pride in the Office. The Sheriff's Office endorses the secure use of social media to enhance communication with citizens, collaboration, and information exchange; streamline processes; and community outreach. This policy establishes the agency's position on the utility and management of social media and provides guidance on its management, administration, and oversight. This policy is not meant to address one particular form of social media; but rather social media in general, as advances in technology will occur and new tools will emerge.

The office recognizes the role social networking plays in the personal lives of some department personnel. This policy will outline precautionary guidelines as well as prohibitions on the use of social media. Limitations on conduct on social media are for the protection of the reputation and safety of all Office members, their friends, and families. Internet-based information may be used to discredit individuals, place employees and families at risk and damage the reputations of the Office and law enforcement. Members are encouraged to take every precaution available to make personal information inaccessible to the general public who are not specifically granted access to their information.

II. DEFINITIONS

Blog

A Self-published diary or commentary on a particular topic that may allow visitors to post responses, reactions, or comments. The term is short for "Web log".

Internet

The external worldwide web; an electronic communications network that connects computer networks and organizational computer facilities around the world.

Internet Posting

Any written correspondence, photographs or other media depictions made to private or public internet domains.

Page

The specific portion of a social media website where content is displayed and managed by an individual or individuals with administrator rights.

Post

Content an individual shares on a social media site or the act of publishing content on a site.

Profile

Information that a user provides about himself or herself on a social networking site.

Social Media

A category of internet-based resources that integrate user-generated content and user participation. This includes, but is not limited to, social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Nextdoor, LinkedIn), microblogging sites (Twitter, Nixle), photo- and video-sharing sites (Flickr, YouTube, Snapchat), wikis (Wikipedia), blogs and any other like site.

Social Networks

Online platforms where users can create profiles, share information, and socialize with others using a range of technologies.

Speech

Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, videotape, or related forms of communication.

Web 2.0

The second generation of the World Wide Web focused on shareable, user-generated content, rather than static web pages. Some use this term interchangeably with social media.

Wiki

Web page(s) that can be edited collaboratively.

III. POLICY

Social media provides a potentially valuable means of assisting the Sheriff's Office and its personnel in meeting community outreach, problem-solving, investigative, crime prevention, and related objectives. This policy identifies potential uses that may be explored or expanded upon as deemed reasonable by the administrative and some personnel. The personal use of social media can have bearing on departmental personnel in their official capacity. As such, this policy provides information of a precautionary nature as well as prohibitions on the use of social media by agency personnel.

A. Employee Internet Postings

The Sheriff's Office expects employees to use common sense when posting on any social media site.

Employees should consider the possible adverse consequences of internet postings and are encouraged to seek the guidance of supervisors or the social media

coordinator regarding any posting that may disrupt law enforcement operations or impede the performance of official duties.

As public employees, personnel are cautioned that while they do not relinquish their First Amendment rights they would otherwise enjoy as citizens to comment on matters of public interest, individuals who accept public employment must also accept certain limitations to those rights. Personnel can express themselves on social media sites to the degree that their speech and postings do not:

- Bring discredit to the employee if any other information on the social media account associates the employee with the Sheriff's Office, or to the Office to include "liking, sharing or commenting" in support of postings that contain:
 - Harassment, threats of violence or similar conduct.
 - Language that ridicules, maligns, disparages, expresses bias, negative connotations, or disrespect toward any race, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, or any other protected class of individuals.
 - Impair working relationships of the Sheriff's Office for which loyalty and confidentiality are important.
 - Interfere with or compromise a criminal or administrative investigation, bring disrepute, discredit, or damage to the integrity of the Sheriff's Office or content that would otherwise violate the On and Off-Duty Conduct provision contained in section II.(U) of [P&P-C-101](#) *General Conduct*, to wit: *Members must not engage in any activity or conduct, on- or off-duty, which discredits them, the County or the Office.*
 - Impede the performance of official duties or disrupt law enforcement operations; or
 - Impair discipline and harmony among coworkers

The Sheriff's Office encourages employees to be proud of where they work and to share appropriate postings on their personal social media sites as they relate to the Sheriff's Office as well as from their daily interactions with the community. For example, a photo of deputies at a child's lemonade stand is fine; a photo showing a crime scene is not. Any postings made to social media sites that include reference to the Sheriff's Office will be shared with the social media coordinator when possible. Employees who exercise the option to post pictures, statements, or bio information about themselves that remotely link the employee to this Office will strictly adhere to the conduct required in this policy.

The Sheriff's Office is dedicated to ensuring the efficient, harmonious, and non-partisan provision of quality law enforcement to the residents of and visitors to Douglas County. Additionally, the Sheriff's Office is committed to assuring that law enforcement protection will be available to the public free from political overtones or the appearance of politicized justice and employees of the Sheriff's Office will deal impartially with any individual they encounter. In order to foster this environment, employees of the Sheriff's Office will not display partisan political statements nor political badges, buttons, or similar partisan emblems or images on their social media pages or profiles while in uniform or wearing the agency logo. As an elected official the Sheriff is exempt from these restrictions.

Employees will consider the impact on officer safety when posting information to social media sites.

Sheriff's Office logos, uniforms, or similar identifying items will not be posted on personal web pages for personal gain.

When using social media, employees should be mindful that their speech becomes part of the worldwide electronic domain. Therefore, adherence to the Sheriff's Office's code of conduct is required in the personal use of social media. Engaging in prohibited speech may provide grounds for undermining or impeaching an employee's testimony in criminal proceedings, may disrupt or hinder law enforcement operations or impede the performance of official duties. Employees are therefore prohibited from the following:

- Speech containing obscene or sexually explicit language, images, or acts and statements or other forms of speech that ridicule, malign, disparage, or otherwise express bias against any race, any religion, or any protected class of individuals.
- Speech involving themselves or other personnel reflecting behavior that would reasonably be considered reckless or irresponsible; and
- Employees may not divulge information gained by any reason of their authority; make any statements, speeches, appearances, and endorsements; or publish materials that could reasonably be considered to represent the views or positions of this Office.

Employees should be aware that they may be subject to civil litigation for:

- Publishing or posting false information that harms the reputation of another person, group, or organization (defamation);
- Publishing or posting private facts and personal information about someone without their permission that has not been previously revealed to the public, is not of legitimate public concern, and would be offensive to a reasonable person;
- Using someone else's name, likeness, or other personal attributes without that person's permission for an exploitative purpose; or
- Publishing the creative work of another, trademarks, or certain confidential business information without the permission of the owner.

Exceptions may be authorized by the Sheriff and may include appropriately directed and supervised undercover internet investigations.

Employees who exercise the option to post pictures, statements, or bio information about themselves that remotely link the member to this office will strictly adhere to the conduct required in this policy.

IV. PROCEDURES

A. Security and Access

Employees should be aware that privacy settings and social media sites are constantly in flux, and they should never assume that personal information posted on such sites is protected.

Employees should expect that any information created, transmitted, downloaded, exchanged, or discussed in a public online forum may be accessed by the Sheriff's Office at any time without prior notice.

B. Social Media Site Management

The social media coordinator will maintain and monitor the Office's social networking accounts.

No Web 2.0 application will be initiated or run in the name of the Office without the expressed written consent of the Sheriff. No employee will post material on behalf of the agency without the expressed written consent of the Sheriff. For example, no one shall create a social media page titles the DCSO K9 Facebook page or a Twitter account posting as the DCSO Sheriff.

Requests by divisions/sections/units to utilize "social media" as a formal communications tool must be submitted in writing to the social media coordinator who will then review and make a recommendation to the Sheriff or designee.

Request to develop projects or program-specific uses for any social media tools should be directed to the social media coordinator for consultation and development. Consideration will be given to the appropriate venue and application of tools.

C. Sheriff's Office Social Media Posting

1. Department-Sanctioned Presence

Where possible, each Sheriff's Office social media page will include an introductory statement that clearly specifies the purpose and scope of the agency's presence on the website. Efforts should be made to link the pages to the Sheriff's Office official website. Where possible social media pages should state that the opinions expressed by visitors do not reflect the opinions of the Office.

2. Site Creation and Approval

All official Sheriff's Office social media sites or pages must be created and approved by the social media coordinator or as otherwise determined by the Sheriff or designee.

3. Commenting and Comment Monitoring

The Office's social networking pages are available for any comment on topics relevant to the business of the Office or in response to a posting. The comments may be positive or negative, praise or criticism. There are several advantages to social media networking to include community outreach and communication and establishing a forum for interested people to share comments and criticisms with the Office so that members may learn about real or perceived shortcomings and respond appropriately either by disseminating correct information, offering an explanation, or changing its actions and reporting the change.

Pages will clearly indicate that posted comments will be monitored and the Office reserves the right to remove obscenities, off-topic comments, and personal attacks. Such comments include but are not limited to, name-calling, profanity, obscenity, defamation, or remarks disparaging people on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability or national origin.

The social media coordinator will remove inappropriate comments from the webpage as soon as they are discovered.

No comments will be deleted from Sheriff's Office social media where there is the ability to hide comments. If the ability to hide comments does not exist and the social media coordinator determines the comment is so extreme that it would be detrimental to leave the comment as is, the comment should be captured via screen shot (if the account is not archived, ex. Nextdoor.com) and saved for future reference.

4. Site Shut-Down and Archive

The social media coordinator will have the username and passwords to all Sheriff's Office official accounts with the ability to shut down the sites if needed. All social media sites will be archived through Archive Social and employees with official Sheriff's Office social media sites will connect them to Archive Social for that purpose.

5. Adherence to Applicable Law, Regulations and Policies

Social media content will adhere to all applicable laws, regulations and policies including all information technology and records management policies.

Social media content is subject to public records laws. Relevant records retention schedules apply to social media. Content must be managed, stored and retrieved to comply with open records laws and e-discovery laws and policies.

Office personnel representing the Office via social media outlets will identify themselves as a member of the Office and will adhere to all agency policies. No employee shall individually represent themselves as speaking for the Sheriff's Office.

While the Office does not regularly monitor employee's social networking sites, if it becomes aware of a violation of this policy, employees may be ordered to remove all references to the Sheriff's Office from their site and may be disciplined appropriately up to and including termination for their conduct.

[*\(See P&P-B-119 – Use of Communication Technologies.\)*](#)

By Order of the Sheriff