



Social Media and Networking

.01 Policy

It is the policy of the Bladensburg Police Department to recognize and support the rights of all employees to engage in personal internet-based activities including Social Networking and Media while off duty to the extent that those private or personal activities do not infringe upon the integrity or security of the Department's operations, objectives, employees, or clients. The Bladensburg Police Department highly values and acknowledges the benefits of employee participation in law enforcement social media or networking sites and hence, nothing in this general order is intended to deter or prohibit employees from participating, accessing or posting on those sites to accomplish a law enforcement objective.

Social networking has, with the abundant availability of internet access to end-users and the increase of portable digital devices, become an intricate part of everyday communication. This general order is intended to provide clear guidelines for all employees of the Bladensburg Police Department who desire to participate in those networks and to preserve and protect the professional interest of the Department.

.02 Terms

Blog: A blog (short for web-log) is a personal online journal that 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 Website ant hosts the blog. Topics sometimes include brief philosophical musings, commentary on Internet and other social issues, and links to other sites the author favors, especially those that support the authors viewpoint.

Tweets: Brief text messaging of one-hundred forty (140) characters or less posted on a social media site.

.03 Governing Legislation and Reference

Governing Legislation:

Electronic Communication Privacy Act (1986).

Personnel Law, Employee Privacy (2008).

Town Ordinance 8-2012, Establishment of Official Town Seal, Town Logo and Official Stationary.

Forms: N/A

.04 Procedure

A. Use of Blogs, Web Postings, Chat Rooms, etc.

As an employee of the Bladensburg Police Department, the use and application of good judgement, decency, and common sense is expected both on and off duty. This expectation also applies while performing official duties of the Bladensburg Police Department and/ or engaging in various computer or digital media activities both on and off duty.

Participation in World Wide Web/ Internet services such as Web postings, social networking sites like Face book, Twitter, YouTube and Myspace, or entering tweets or blogs, participating in chat rooms, dating services, etc., should be carefully considered and monitored by the employee making the posting for proper personal conduct.

The absence of, or lack of explicit reference to a specific site, does not limit the extent of the application of this policy. Where no policy or guidelines exist, employees should use their professional judgement and take the most prudent action possible, which includes, but is not limited to, consultation with supervision or administration.

Employees are not to use, publish, or cause to be used, distributed, or authorize to be used, published or distributed, any official Departmental information, restricted or classified agency documents, photographs, speeches, reports, communications, videos, or evidence obtained in connection with any employee's official performance of duty or while acting under color of law, for personal pleasure or use.

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All employees of the Department are to refrain from posting on social personal networking sites or media, photographs of Department personnel wearing agency distinguishable uniforms, logos, seals, shields, badges, weapons, stationary, or writings that readily identify one as a member of the Bladensburg Police Department or the Town of Bladensburg.

Employees shall guard themselves accordingly and shall not participate in any conduct that is likely to have an adverse affect on the reputation, the integrity or the operations of the Bladensburg Police Department.

B. Online Etiquette

Personal blogs shall have clear disclaimers that the views expressed by the author in their Blog are the author's alone and do not represent the views of the Department. The person shall write clearly and in first person making the writing clear that the views expressed are personal and do not represent the Bladensburg Police Department.

Information published on blogs, forums, and social networking sites will be in compliance with all Town, State, and Federal disclosures and confidentiality policies and laws with regard to information that the employee has access to as the result of their employment with the Department.

Employees shall be respectful to the Department, supervisors, administrators, elected officials, other department employees, and other law enforcement officials.

Social Media activities shall not interfere with work commitments.

Employees shall not reference or cite any information relative to victims, witnesses, court cases or sentencing, current or past criminal investigations, inmates, fellow employees, witness testimony, confidential investigations, witness protection matters, traffic investigations, or provide any information on citizens that was acquired in the performance of duty. In all cases, employees will not publish any sensitive Departmental information regarding any matter that may impede Departmental operations or compromise officer safety.

Employees shall adhere to copyright laws and reference or cite sources appropriately.

C. Departmental Equipment

Employees are prohibited from using Department owned or leased computers or cell phones with Internet connection to post, write or respond to blogs, tweets, or any other written communication relative to social networking, social dating, or social media for personal use.

Exception

- Participation in an active criminal investigation and the postings are part of the investigation;
- Participation in an administrative (internal) investigation and the postings are part of the investigation;
- Participation in Law Enforcement Websites; or,
- With authorization from the Chief of Police.

D. Photography and Videography

Department personnel will not use personal mobile phones, cameras, or any other device to capture photographs and or video of any police controlled scene or persons in police custody.

In the event of exigent circumstances where evidence of significant value could be lost, destroyed, or is time sensitive due to environmental conditions if photographic evidence is not obtained immediately, Department personnel may elect to use a personally owned device to capture evidence in the performance of the investigation. The use of the device will be reported to a supervisor and must be articulated in the Case Report. The mere convenience for personnel or waiting for the response of a Department owned device does not constitute exigent circumstances.

Any photographic evidence captured on personally owned devices will be transferred to a department device as soon as possible and a supervisor will verify that the image(s) have been removed from the personally owned device before the end of the employee's tour of duty.

E. Administrative Oversight

No Expectation of Privacy

Employees are cautioned that all communications, websites, e-mail, and text messaging over Department owned or leased

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computers, MDC's, and telephones are subject to review for administrative purposes.

Employees shall not post any private or personal information of fellow employees or supervisors without their written consent, including but not limited to, their names, family members' names, addresses, numerical identifiers or photographs.

Online Activity Restrictions

Employees are prohibited from viewing, responding to, or updating personal social media networking sites while on duty, which includes the use of personally owned devices. An exception will be granted for those employees utilizing personal devices while on authorized breaks.

The accessing of law enforcement social media or networks during duty hours to accomplish a law enforcement objective is authorized.

Employees specifically authorized by the Chief of Police to monitor social networking and media may observe or review target websites for policy violations.

Text messaging or posting blogs or tweets while operating Department owned or leased vehicles is strictly prohibited, whether on or off duty.

HISTORY: Adopted January 1, 2013

This General Order supersedes all other orders and memoranda in conflict therewith.

Authority:



Charles L. Owens
Chief of Police