
PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The Law Enforcement Code of Ethics requires all sworn law enforcement officers to carry out their duties with courtesy, respect, and professionalism. The Department is committed to maintaining legitimacy with the community and safeguarding the public's trust. The Department is charged with the duty to protect life and property, to maintain the peace, to prevent crime, and to enforce criminal laws and ordinances. These duties are best accomplished when all members conduct themselves in a professional, law abiding, respectful and courteous manner.

This Order describes the Department's policies and procedures regarding the personal use of social media by members.

I. POLICY

This policy applies to personal use of social media by members of the Department. All members are reminded that they are strictly accountable for their conduct at all times, whether on or off duty, inside or outside of San Francisco. Members who maintain personal social media accounts and disseminate information related to their employment with the Department must understand their social media posts may discredit the Department, negatively impact the Department's operations and hinder the efficiency of public services. However, this order is not intended to prohibit activity by members that is protected by the First Amendment.

As part of a smart and thoughtful police department, members must be mindful that any activities or statements made on social media sites are done so in an online domain where confidentiality cannot be assured even if a member creates "private" or "limited access" accounts or customizes privacy settings. Any statements, photographs, video clips or information sent over the internet may still be viewed and disseminated by third parties, even after the content has been edited or deleted by the user.

When assessing what activities may violate this Order, the Department will hold members accountable to the conduct standards described in the department's general orders, including but not limited to DGO 2.01, "General Rules of Conduct" and DGO 11.07, "Prohibiting Discrimination, Harassment and Retaliation," and the City's personnel policies prohibiting harassment, discrimination and retaliation.

II. DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

"Social media" is defined as online platforms that facilitate social networking, social networking platforms, blogging and/or photo and video-sharing, Podcasts, RSS Feeds or other similar platforms. Social media includes, but is not limited to, proprietary social media sites, applications such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, MySpace, Twitter and YouTube, as well as collaboration services such as Wikipedia and Blogspot or any emergent social media platform or service now in existence or that become available in the future.

III. PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY DEPARTMENT MEMBERS

Members engaging in any personal use of social media are to exercise good judgment and carefully consider how their use of social media might impact the performance of their official duties. All information members acquire through their official capacity is considered confidential and shall not be disclosed on personal social media unless authorized, in writing, by their commanding officer. Information that members disseminate through the use of personal social media may be used against members to undermine their credibility, or interfere with official police business, or compromise ongoing investigations and may affect their employment status with the Department. In addition, releasing information (including digital images) on personal social media may endanger the safety of members and/or their family members.

Accordingly, members shall comply with the following:

- A. Members are prohibited from any personal use of social media while on duty, except as part of their official duties and authorized, in writing, by their commanding officer.
- B. Members are prohibited from posting, on personal social media, photographs of themselves in uniform or display official Department identification including but not limited to patches, badges, emblems, logos, or marked/unmarked vehicles on internet sites without authorization from the Department. These prohibitions do not apply to photographs taken at official Department ceremonies (e.g., promotions, awards, medals/citations, etc.).
- C. Members are cautioned to identify themselves only as general law enforcement officers and may not disclose information about their assignment that would reveal investigatory or security procedures that could harm Department's operations. Divulging identifying information on personal social media sites may endanger officer safety and limit a member's eligibility for certain assignments. Members who serve, seek, or are assigned to serve in an undercover capacity or work in highly sensitive assignments are particularly at risk.
- D. Because of the potential risks associated with the disclosure of one's status as a member of the Department, members are cautioned about revealing Department affiliations of other individuals (e.g., partners, co-workers, supervisors, etc.), including but not limited to posting, "tagging" and/or sharing pictures of other members that would disclose their affiliation with the Department. Sharing confidential information could endanger individuals and department operations.
- E. Members shall treat all official Department business as confidential. Members are prohibited from posting on the internet or personal social media any information (e.g., witness statements, crime scene photographs, videos, etc.) obtained as a result of their position with the Department except as authorized, in writing, by the commanding officer.

- F. Members are prohibited from using any Department email address in conjunction with personal use of social media.
- G. Members are prohibited from any use of personal social media to have contact or communications (e.g., “friending”, “following”, messaging, etc.) about any matter under investigation or pending in criminal court with professionals such as bail bond agents or lawyers associated with the matter under investigation or pending in a criminal court. Such contacts or communications on social media could impair the member’s capacity to perform his or her duties or jeopardize an ongoing investigation or criminal case. All such contacts and communications shall be done through Department authorized methods and channels (e.g., Department email, etc.)
- H. Members are prohibited from any use of personal social media to contact or communicate (e.g., “friending”, “following”, messaging, etc.) with witnesses, crime victims, or any person under the age of 18 who members interact with through the course of their official duties with the Department. Such contacts or communications on social media could impair the member’s capacity to perform his or her duties or jeopardize an ongoing investigation or criminal case. All such contacts and communications shall be done through Department authorized methods and channels (e.g., Department email, etc.). These restrictions do not apply to communications with relatives of Department members with whom members have a relationship outside the Department.
- I. Members are prohibited from posting on social media anything that depicts him or herself in an obscene or sexually explicit manner.
- J. Members are prohibited from any personal use of social media that violates any local, state or federal law.
- K. Members shall immediately report any serious crime or urgent police matter consistent with Department General Order 2.01.