




COLCHESTER POLICE DEPARTMENT

		SUBJECT: Social Media	
EFFECTIVE DATE: June 15, 2020		NUMBER: General Order # 9	
REFERENCE Replaces G.O. 9 of 01/09/2017		SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS: none	
REEVALUATION DATE: as needed		APPROVED: 	
		NO. PAGES: 8	

POLICY: The Colchester Police Department (CPD) endorses the secure use of social media to enhance communication, collaboration, and information exchange; streamline processes; and foster productivity. This policy is not meant to address one particular form of social media, rather social media in general, as advances in technology will occur and new tools will emerge. Social media provides a potentially valuable means of assisting the department and its personnel in meeting community outreach, problem-solving, investigations, crime prevention, and related objectives. This policy identifies potential uses that may be explored or expanded upon as deemed reasonable by administrative and supervisory personnel. The department also recognizes the role that these tools play in the personal lives of some department 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 department personnel.

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I. DEFINITIONS

- a. **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.”
- b. **Page:** The specific portion of a social media website where content is displayed, and managed by an individual or individuals with administrator rights.
- c. **Post:** Content an individual shares on a social media site or the act of publishing content on a site.

- d. **Profile:** Information that a user provides about him/herself on a social networking site.
- e. **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, Tumblr, LinkedIn, etc), microblogging sites (Twitter, Nixle, etc), photo- and video-sharing sites (Flickr, YouTube, Snapchat, etc), wikis (Wikipedia), blogs, and news sites (Digg, Reddit). This includes public facing content of new sites or other forms of public commentary.
- f. **Social Networks:** Online platforms where users can create profiles, share information, and socialize with others using a range of technologies.
- g. **Speech:** Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, videotape, or related forms of communication.
- h. **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.
- i. **Wiki:** Web page(s) that can be edited collaboratively.

II. ON-THE JOB USE

- a. **Department-Sanctioned Presence**
 - i. **Determine Strategy**
 - 1. Where possible, each social media page shall include an introductory statement that clearly specifies the purpose and scope of the agency's presence on the website.
 - 2. Where possible, the page(s) should link to the department's official website.
 - 3. Social media page(s) shall be designed for the target audience(s) such as youth or potential police recruits.
 - ii. **Procedures**
 - 1. All department social media sites or pages shall be approved by the Chief of Police or his/her designee and shall be administered by members approved by the Chief.

2. Where possible, social media pages shall clearly indicate they are maintained by the department and shall have department contact information prominently displayed.
3. Social media content shall adhere to applicable laws, regulations, and policies, including all information technology and records management policies.
4. Content is subject to public records laws. Relevant records retention schedules apply to social media content. Content must be managed, stored, and retrieved to comply with open records laws and e-discovery laws and policies.
5. Where possible, social media pages should state that the opinions expressed by visitors to the page(s) do not reflect the opinions of the department.
6. Pages shall clearly indicate that posted comments will be monitored and that the department reserves the right to remove obscenities, off-topic comments, and personal attacks.
7. Pages shall clearly indicate that any content posted or submitted for posting is subject to public disclosure.

iii. Department Sanctioned Use

1. Department personnel representing the department via social media outlets shall do the following:
 - a. Conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the department and, accordingly, as outlined in General Order # 1, shall adhere to all department standards of conduct and observe conventionally accepted protocols and proper decorum including but not limited to the Guidelines in Rule 17 of G.O. # 1, Conduct Unbecoming.
 - b. Identify themselves as a member of the department.
 - c. Not make statements about the guilt or innocence of any suspect or arrestee, or comments concerning pending prosecutions, nor post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate confidential information, including photographs or videos, related to department training, activities, or work-related assignments without express written permission.
 - d. Not conduct political activities or private business.
 - e. Employees are authorized to access social media for personal use on department computers only briefly in a

manner as to not interfere with the department's mission and goals.

- f. Department personnel use of personally owned devices to manage the department's social media activities or in the course of official duties is prohibited without express permission.
- g. Employees shall observe and abide by all copyright, trademark, and service mark restrictions in posting materials to electronic media.

iv. Investigative Use

1. Social media may be used by members of this department as an investigative tool for valid law enforcement purposes consistent with this policy. Unless such information is relevant to the individual or organization's suspected criminal activity or if required to identify the individual for a valid law enforcement purpose, the employee will not utilize social media to seek or retain information regarding:
 - a. Individuals or organizations solely on the basis of their religious, political, social views, or non-criminal activities.
 - b. An individual or organization's participation in a particular non-criminal organization or lawful event.
 - c. An individual's race, national origin, citizenship, place of origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation or other legally protected personal characteristic.
 - d. An individual's age other than to determine if someone is a minor.
2. Information developed from social media sites should be corroborated using traditional investigative tools including interviews, verification of address, verification of internet protocol address information, or other lawful means.
3. Sworn officers of this agency may only use an online alias with prior approval to seek information for a valid law enforcement purpose. This includes investigative uses as well as undercover operations.
 - a. Employees seeking approval for an alias account will file a completed Social Media Alias Request Form (Appendix A) to their immediate supervisor.
 - b. Final approval of the request form will rest with a command level officer of this department.

- c. Documentation of any use of an alias account must be made in the corresponding officer's investigative report.

4. All information with regards to the alias accounts, to include usernames and password, shall be shared with the employee's supervisor. No substantive changes to the alias account may be made without supervisor knowledge and approval.

b. Potential Uses

- i. Social media is a valuable investigative tool when seeking evidence or information about missing persons; wanted persons; gang participation; crimes perpetrated online (i.e., cyberbullying, cyberstalking); and photos or videos of a crime posted by a participant or observer.
- ii. Social media can be used for community outreach and engagement by providing crime prevention tips; offering online-reporting opportunities; sharing crime maps and data; sharing information about news, events and awards; and soliciting tips about unsolved crimes, and more.
- iii. Social media can be used to make time-sensitive notifications related to road closures, special events, weather emergencies, and missing or endangered persons.
- iv. Persons seeking employment and volunteer positions use the Internet to search for opportunities, and social media can be a valuable recruitment mechanism.

III. PERSONAL USE

- a. Precautions and Prohibitions - barring state law or binding employment contracts to the contrary, department personnel shall abide by the following when using social media.
 - i. Department personnel are free to express themselves as private citizens on social media sites to the degree that their speech does not impair working relationships of this department for which loyalty and confidentiality are important, impede the performance of duties, impair discipline and harmony among coworkers, to a degree that impedes the ability to provide law enforcement services or otherwise impair the efficiency of this department..

- ii. As public employees, department personnel are cautioned that speech on- or off-duty, made pursuant to their official duties—that is, speech that owes its existence to the employee’s professional duties and responsibilities—is not protected speech under the First Amendment and may form the basis for discipline if deemed detrimental to the department. Department personnel should assume that their speech and related activity on social media sites will reflect upon their office and this department.
- iii. Department personnel shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any information to which they have access as a result of their employment without written permission from the chief or his/her designee.
- iv. Employees shall not use a social networking site or other medium of communications in a different name or anonymously, to comment or engage with individuals, groups or organizations on issues, topics or correspondence that would be considered town affairs, in their personal or employment capacity.
- v. For safety and security reasons, department personnel are urged to give careful consideration prior to disclosing their employment with this department. No member shall post information pertaining to any other member of the department without their permission. As such, department personnel are urged to give thoughtful consideration prior to doing the following:
 1. Display department logos, uniforms, or similar identifying items on personal web pages.
 2. Post personal photographs or provide similar means of personal recognition that may cause them to be identified as a police officer of this department. Officers who are, or who may reasonably be expected to work in undercover operations, shall not post any form of visual or personal identification.
- vi. When using social media, department personnel should be mindful that their speech becomes part of the worldwide electronic domain. Therefore, adherence to the department’s code of conduct is required in the personal use of social media. In particular, department personnel are prohibited from the following:
 1. 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.

2. Speech involving themselves or other department personnel reflecting behavior that would reasonably be considered reckless or irresponsible.

- vii. Engaging in prohibited speech noted herein, may provide grounds for undermining or impeaching an officer's testimony in criminal proceedings. Department personnel thus sanctioned are subject to discipline up to and including termination of office.

- viii. Department personnel may not divulge information gained by 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 department without express authorization.

- ix. Department personnel should be aware that they may be subject to civil litigation for:
 1. Publishing or posting false information that harms the reputation of another person, group, or organization (defamation)
 2. 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.
 3. Using someone else's name, likeness, or other personal attributes without that person's permission for an exploitative purpose.
 4. Publishing the creative work of another, trademarks, or certain confidential business information without the permission of the owner.

- x. Department personnel 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.

- xi. Department personnel should expect that any information created, transmitted, downloaded, exchanged, or discussed in a public online

forum may be accessed by the department at any time without prior notice.

- xii. Reporting violations—Any employee becoming aware of or having knowledge of a posting or of any website or web page in violation of the provision of this policy shall notify his/her supervisor immediately for follow-up action.

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