

Germantown Police Department

Policies and Procedures

Number: 1-29
Effective Date: February 14, 2012
Subject: Social Media
Previous Revisions: December 6, 2011

I. PURPOSE

The Germantown Police Department endorses the secure, responsible use of social media to enhance work-related communication, collaboration and information exchange, streamline processes and foster productivity. This policy establishes this department'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.

II. POLICY

Social media provides a new and potentially valuable means of assisting the department and its personnel in meeting community outreach, problem-solving, investigative, crime prevention, and related objectives. This policy establishes guidelines for use of social media by the department. 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 a bearing on department 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.

III. 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."

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/herself on a social networking site.

Social Media: A category of Internet-based resources that integrates user-generated content and user participation. This includes, but is not limited to, social networking sites (Facebook,

MySpace), microblogging sites (Twitter, Nixle), photo- and video-sharing sites (Flickr, YouTube), wikis (Wikipedia), blogs and news sites (Digg, Reddit).

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 word, 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.

IV. ON-THE-JOB USE

- A. Department personnel seeking to represent the department via social media outlets shall do the following:
1. Obtain permission from the Chief of Police or his/her designee prior to engaging in such activity.
 2. Conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the department, and accordingly, shall adhere to all department standards of conduct and observe conventionally accepted protocols and proper decorum.
 3. Identify themselves as a member of the department.
 4. Not make statements about the guilt or innocence of any suspect or arrestee, or comments concerning pending prosecutions, nor post, transmit, or other disseminate confidential information, including photographs or videos, related to department training, activities, or work-related assignments without permission from the Chief of Police or his/her designee.
 5. Not conduct political activities or private business.
 - a. The use of department computers by department personnel to access social media is prohibited without authorization.
 - b. 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 permission from the Chief of Police or his/her designee.
 - c. Employees shall observe and abide by all copyright, trademark and service mark restrictions in posting material to electronic media.

V. PERSONAL USE

A. Precautions and Prohibitions

Department personnel shall abide by the following for the personal, off-duty use of social media:

1. As public employees, department personnel are cautioned that their speech and related activity on social sites will reflect upon their office and this department. Therefore, employees engaged in the personal use of social media, whether it be the employee's own sites, the sites of others, media pages, professional sites or other information exchange forums, must not state or imply that they are speaking or acting on behalf of the Germantown Police Department or presenting or representing the interests of the department.
2. Department personnel shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any confidential or proprietary information to which they have access as a result of their employment without written permission from the Chief of Police or his/her designee, including, without limitation, Social Security numbers, protected health information, attorney-client communications and information concerning current or pending criminal investigations or criminal or civil proceedings involving the department's work.
3. Department personnel are cautioned not to do the following:
 - a. Display the Official Seal of the City of Germantown, the name of the Germantown Police Department, department logos, badge, patch, or patrol vehicle in such a manner as to give the appearance of an official site of the City of Germantown or the Germantown Police Department.
 - b. Officers who are, or who may reasonably be expected to work in undercover operations, shall not post any form of visual or personal identification.
 - c. Brandish any weaponry (actual or simulated), tactical instruments, or mechanical restraints.
4. When using social media, department personnel should be mindful that their speech becomes part of the worldwide electronic domain. Therefore, department personnel are prohibited from the following:
 - a. Speech about co-workers, supervisors, or the department containing vulgar, obscene, sexually explicit, threatening, intimidating, or harassing language, images, or acts and statements, or other forms of speech that ridicules, harasses, maligns, disparages, or otherwise

expresses bias against any person(s) on account of race, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, or any other protected characteristic.

5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. Any violation of this policy will result in discipline, up to and including termination.

VI. REVIEW PROCESS

An annual review of this policy will be conducted to determine if it should be revised, cancelled or continued in its present form.

This order shall remain in effect until revoked or superseded by competent authority.