



Carroll County Department of Fire & EMS

Standard Operating Procedure: 1.11	Effective Date: May 5, 2023
Subject: Social Media Policy	Section: Administrative Policies
Authorized: Chief Michael Robinson	Revision Date: N/A

I. PURPOSE

Social Media provides a valuable tool to reach a large number of people quickly and efficiently. As such, the Department of Fire & EMS (DFEMS) will use its official social media presence to provide time-sensitive notifications related to fire incidents, special events, disasters, and other public emergencies.

DFEMS will also use its official site to aide in community outreach and educational efforts, and assist in the communications of fire safety advice, medical recommendations, recognition, success stories, and statistics.

DFEMS also understands that the distribution of unauthorized information can have negative impact on the department and may violate federal, state, or local laws, and therefore is expressly prohibited.

II. DEFINITIONS

A. **Social Media** – Includes, but is not limited to, blogs, podcasts, discussion forums, on-line collaborative information and publishing systems that are accessible to internal and external audiences, video sharing, and social networks like Myspace, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, etc.

III. PROCEDURES

- A. DFEMS social media presence will be administered by the Director/Chief’s office.
- B. Entities or organizations associated or working within the Department of Fire & EMS may have additional social media policies. Those policies shall be equivalent or more rigorous than the DFEMS policies.
- C. Personnel are encouraged to submit photos, videos articles, and other material internally for posting on DFEMS public social media platforms. These items can be sent directly to DFEMS@carrollcountymd.gov for the Director/Chief to approve for distribution.

- D. The use of personal recording devices such as cameras, video recorders, helmet cameras, audio recorders, cell phones or any device with audio or recorder applications are prohibited while at any incident scene without prior approval of the Director/Chief or designee.
- E. Employees and volunteer members shall not develop content to include photo images, video, or audio of any incident scene or patient information on any personal social media platform.
- F. Fire companies are encouraged to promote activities as a recruitment and retention tool.
- G. DFEMS is aware that many of its employees and members use social media and does not discourage its use. In general, DFEMS considers social media activity to be a personal endeavor and employees and members may use social media as long as such use does not interfere with performance of assigned duties or conflict with DFEMS policies.
- H. DFEMS employees and members are free to express themselves as private citizens on social media platforms to the degree that their speech does not impair or impede the performance of duties, impair discipline and harmony among its employees and members, or negatively affect the public perception of DFEMS or any associated organizations.
- I. Employees and members are cautioned that their speech, either on or off duty, and in the course of their official duties that has a nexus to the employees or members duties and responsibilities, may not be protected speech under the first amendment.
 - 1. This may form the basis for discipline if deemed detrimental to DFEMS or associated organizations.
 - 2. Employees and members shall assume that their speech and related activity on social media platforms will reflect upon their position within DFEMS or associated organizations.
 - 3. Employees and members shall refrain from the following when posting on social media:
 - a. Disparaging or false statements or the use of profane language
 - b. Making statements or other forms of speech that ridicule, malign, disparage or otherwise express bias against any race, religion, or protected class of individuals
 - c. Sharing confidential or proprietary information
 - d. Violating DFEMS or departmental policy
 - e. Publishing any material that could reasonably be considered to represent the views or positions of DFEMS or associated organizations without prior approval of the Director/Chief or Designee
 - f. Any photographs, video or audio taken while performing duties that contain identifying features such as addresses, faces, license plates, or individual identifying details
 - g. Any photographs, video or images that are explicit or constitute indecent exposure of an individual
- J. DFEMS or associated organization cannot limit an employee or member from taking video, audio, or pictures of emergency incidents or activities while they are off duty; however, such actions are not authorized by DFEMS and the employee or member will be personally responsible for any civil or criminal liability arising from posting any of this information.

IV. RECISION

This Standard Operating Procedure rescinds all directives regarding the Social Media Policy or similar content previously issued for personnel of the Carroll County Department of Fire & EMS.