

Danville Fire Department Social Media Policy

1. Article 1 PURPOSE

The Danville Fire Department endorses the secure and mindful use of social media to enhance communication and information exchange, streamline processes, and share with our community the brave and professional service it provides in a way that was never available to previous administrations. This policy establishes the Danville Fire Department's position on the use and management of social media and provides guidelines on the management, administration, oversight thereof and seeks to clarify the boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate use of the Internet and social media by fire Department personnel. This policy is not meant to address one particular form of social media but rather social media and social engagement in general and is outlined in general terms as technology will continue to evolve and the modern fire service must adapt to this ever-changing landscape.

2. Article 2 PHILOSOPHY

Social media provides a valuable means of assisting the Department and its personnel in meeting training requirements, sharing experiences, and ultimately allowing for a direct to the public means of communication. This Department exists to serve the community of Danville and as such, expects its members to maintain a level of professionalism when representing the Department, which includes online activities.

With real time, online information sharing, the Department recognizes the need to address the online presence of the Department, including but not limited to: Department sanctioned social media profiles, individual station social media presence, and the presence each of its members has online as the membership is the direct representation for this Department. This Department believes in the Right to Free Speech and recognizes the responsibility that that Right carries – a person can speak freely, but that does not give immunity to the consequences of said speech. The Department recognizes that the proper functioning of any organization relies on the public's confidence and trust in the individual personnel to carry out the function of their role. Therefore, any matter which brings a member or the Department into disrepute has the corresponding effect of reducing public confidence and trust in the Department, thus impeding the ability to work with and serve our community.

This Department recognizes the role that social media tools may play in the personal lives of Department members and their families. The personal use of social media can have an effect on Department personnel in their official capacity as firefighters and can also affect the trust which the public has placed in the Department to be professional at all times. As such, any publication through any medium which is potentially adverse to the operation, morale, or efficiency of the Department will be deemed a violation of this policy. This policy is a means to provide guidance of a precautionary nature as well as restrictions and prohibitions on the use of social media by Department personnel.

3. Article 3 DEFINITIONS

- 3.1. *Blog*: A self-published diary or commentary on a particular topic that may allow visitors to post responses, reactions, or comments.
- 3.2. *Post*: Content an individual shares on a social media platform or the act of publishing content on a site.
- 3.3. *Profile*: Information that a user provides about himself or herself on a social networking platform.
- 3.4. *Social Media*: A category of Internet-based resources that enable the user to generate content and encourage social interaction. This includes, but is not limited to, social networking platforms such as Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Wikipedia, blogs, and an ever-growing list of sites.
- 3.5. *Social Networks*: Platforms where users can create profiles, share information, and socialize with others using a range of technologies.
- 3.6. *Speech*: Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, videotape, or related forms of communication

4. Article 4 POLICY

4.1. Strategy & Tactics

4.1.1. Strategy

- 4.1.1.1. The Department shall establish an official Department social media presence, utilizing the prevailing platforms as technology continues to change
- 4.1.1.2. The Department social media account(s) shall be maintained and updated regularly
- 4.1.1.3. The Department shall seek to ensure that its public presence is maintained in a way that solidifies public confidence in its operations and service

4.1.2. Tactics

- 4.1.2.1. A committee shall be established as a standing committee, known as the Social Media Committee
- 4.1.2.2. The Department Public Information Officer (PIO) shall serve as the chairperson of the Social Media Committee
- 4.1.2.3. Any Department member in good standing with their Company is eligible to serve on the Social Media Committee
- 4.1.2.4. The social media platform(s) and profile(s) for the Department shall be reviewed by Fireboard upon creation by the Social Media Committee

- 4.1.2.5. Given that social media is updated and presented to the public in real time, should any issues arise on or from the Department social media presence, it shall be immediately reported to a Department Chief so that it can be addressed in a prompt fashion and/or noted to be reviewed at the following Fireboard meeting
- 4.1.2.6. Social media pages shall clearly indicate they are maintained by the Department
- 4.1.2.7. Social media content shall adhere to applicable laws, regulations, and policies
- 4.1.2.8. If the social media platform allows for public commenting, it should be indicated somewhere in the profile that the opinions expressed by visitors to the page(s) do not reflect the opinions of the Department
- 4.1.2.9. Social media 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
- 4.1.2.10. Social media pages shall clearly indicate that any content posted or submitted for posting is subject to public disclosure

4.2. Department Sanctioned Use

4.2.1. Department personnel represent the Department both in person and online both while actively engaging in Department activities as well as when acting as a private citizen (“The funny thing about firemen is... Night and day they are always firemen.” - Backdraft); this carries over to online presences via personal social media. As such, the Department expects its members to be mindful of the content they share and discuss in general, but especially when it is on topics related to Department activities. The Department encourages its members to promote the Department and the fire service online and share experiences with the intent of educating the public, stimulating engagement, and bringing in new membership. To accomplish this, Department members in their online engagements shall do the following:

- 4.2.1.1. Conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the Department and, accordingly, adhere to all Department standards of conduct and observe conventionally accepted protocols and proper decorum.
- 4.2.1.2. Refrain from critiquing Department engagements until first addressing said critique with Department leadership
- 4.2.1.3. Ensure that if discussing a topic related to the fire service, it is first stated that the opinions expressed are that of the individual posting them and not that of the Department if the message is contradictory to the position of the Department.

- 4.2.2. To prevent potentially damaging content being shared that would bring the Department into disrepute, members should refrain from posting or otherwise disseminating:
- 4.2.2.1. Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, sex, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation
 - 4.2.2.2. Content that promotes or displays illegal activity
 - 4.2.2.3. Images and/or video from incidents which display patients/victims, personal/confidential information (license plates, IDs, etc.), or any other content that may depict the Department in an unsafe or unprofessional manner or compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems
 - 4.2.2.4. Content 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
 - 4.2.2.5. Any content from a fatal or possibly fatal incident
 - 4.2.2.6. Information gained by reason of their authority; 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

4.3. Potential Uses

4.3.1. The Department shall use social media to communicate important information to the public such as real time updates on emergency events, community outreach and education, demonstrations, and training activities, as well as the special recognition of individuals. Maintaining a public social media presence also can allow the community a way to communicate with the Department. Social media can also serve as an investigative tool, assisting the Department in various ways.

4.4. Personal Use

4.4.1. Precautions and Prohibitions - Department personnel shall abide by the following when using social media

4.4.1.1. Department personnel are free to express themselves as private citizens on social media sites to the degree that their speech does not impair or impede the performance of duties, impair discipline and harmony among Department membership and the community, or negatively affect the public perception of the Department.

4.4.2. As public servants, Department personnel are cautioned that their speech either on or off duty, and in the course of their official duties that has a nexus to the member's professional duties and responsibilities may not necessarily be protected speech under the First Amendment.

4.4.3. Department personnel shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any information to which they have access as a result of their membership without expressed permission from the Department or Company Chief

4.4.4. Department personnel should be aware that they may be subject to civil litigation for publishing or posting false information that harms the reputation of another person, group, or organization otherwise known as defamation to include:

4.4.4.1. 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

4.4.4.2. using someone else's name, likeness, or other personal attributes without that person's permission for an exploitative purpose; or publishing the creative work of another, trademarks, or certain confidential business information without the permission of the owner.

4.5. 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

4.6. 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.

5. Article 5 VIOLATIONS

5.1. Reporting violations

5.1.1. Members of this Department are obligated to report any social media activity by any member that violates this policy. If a member is found to be in violation of the policy, they can be subject to disciplinary action

5.2. Violation of this social media policy may result in suspension or dismissal from the Department

6. Article 6 DISCIPLINARY ACTION

6.1. Disciplinary action for violations of this policy shall follow the procedures outlined within the Department Handbook:

“The Danville Firemen's Executive Panel has the right to institute the following penalties for any individual who is in violation of any directives set forth in this Handbook as well as any actions deemed unsavory by a Company and presented to Fire Board to review in the event of an incident: 1st offense, individual is given a written warning; 2nd offense, 30-day suspension; 3rd offense, 60-day suspension; if a 4th offense occurs, the Executive Board Panel would determine, under advisement by the Council of Chiefs, what the outcome would be for that individual. Should the severity of the offense warrant it, the Executive Panel reserves the right to escalate the penalties, bypassing the stepped penalization process outlined here, under the advisement of the Council of Chiefs.”