

	Queen Anne's County Fire & EMS Commission Operations Manual	No. 01.05
		Effective Date: September 4, 2014
	Social Media Policy	Revised Date: January 7, 2016

I. SCOPE

- A. This policy applies to all Queen Anne County Fire Departments and their members.

II. PURPOSE

- A. The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for the use of technology and social media by Departments and their members dealing with official equipment, material, and information.
- B. It also allows for the dissemination of information to the public for recruitment, safety education and public relations purposes. As such, each Department embraces the usage of instant technology and social media.

III. RESPONSIBILITY

- A. It will be the responsibility of each Department and member to comply with this policy. Each Department President or his/her designee will monitor and enforce this policy.

IV. DEFINITIONS

- 1. Department(s) - Means the independent volunteer fire companies or departments providing fire suppression and/or emergency medical services and includes the Fire and EMS Commission.

V. POLICY

- A. For the purposes of this policy, the term instant technology is defined as resources including, but not limited to, instant messaging, texting, paging and social networking sites such as Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and any other information sharing services, websites and/or blogs, including the FEC and all Queen Anne County Fire Department webpages.

- B. All Department social media pages shall be approved by their Departments President or his/her designee. All social media content shall adhere to all applicable laws, regulations and policies including the records management and retention requirements set by any governmental and/or department law and regulation.
- C. The Internet and other information sharing devices are global entities with no control of users or content. Therefore, available resources may contain material of a controversial nature. Each Department is not responsible for information found on these sources.
- D. Departments should understand the value of such technology, but also understand the concerns and issues raised when information is released that violates privacy concerns or portrays their organization to the public in an illegal or negative manner (intentional or unintentional). Therefore, no information, videos or pictures gathered while a member of a Department (this includes emergency calls, meetings, drills, details, trainings or anything obtained on organization property or at organization functions) may be shared or posted in any format without the approval of the Departments President or his/her designee. No Departmental President or his/her designee will allow any posting of an incident that involves a death or the potential of an unfavorable outcome within twenty four hours after the incident.
- E. Under this restriction, all department members are prohibited from disseminating or transmitting in any fashion photographs or images of individuals receiving emergency medical assistance. Any such transmission may violate Maryland State Law and/or the federal HIPPA privacy rights of such individuals and may result in a criminal and/or civil proceeding being commenced against department members and/or employees violating this provision of the policy.
- F. This policy is not intended to limit any department member(s) right to freedom of speech or expression; but each Department is a private entity, it has been put in place to protect the rights of each organization, its members and the public each Department is sworn to protect. Members are advised that their speech directly or by means of instant technology while on duty and in the act of their official duties or in the course of their official duties that has a connection to their professional duties and responsibilities may not be protected speech under the First Amendment.
- G. As a basic constitutional concept of law, a public safety officer may comment on a matter of public concern. However, airing personal workplace grievances does not raise a matter of public concern.
 - 1. In that regard, each department member must adhere to the following guidelines when discussing their Department or any other Department on social media websites:
 - a. Do not make any false statements or use profane language.

- b. Do not make any statements or other forms of speech that ridicule, malign, disparage or otherwise express bias against any race, religion or protected class of individual.
 - c. Make clear that you are expressing your personal opinion and not that of your Department.
 - d. Do not share confidential or proprietary information.
 - e. Do not violate your Department policies including but not limited to the Code of Ethics, Constitution, By-Laws, or Standard Operating Guidelines.
 - f. Do not display your Department logos, uniforms or similar identifying items without prior written permission.
 - g. Do not post personal photographs or provide similar means of personal recognition that may cause you to be identified as a firefighter, officer or member of your Department without prior written permission.
 - h. Do not publish any materials that could reasonably be considered to represent the views or positions of your Department without authorization.
- H. Each Department owns the right to all data and files in any Department owned computer, network, cell phone or other information system. Each Department also reserves the right to monitor electronic mail messages (including personal/private/instant messaging systems) and their content, as well as any and all use of the Internet and of Department computer equipment used to create, view, or access e-mail and Internet content. Members must be aware that the electronic messages sent and received using Department owned equipment are not private and are subject to viewing, downloading, inspection, release, and archiving by Department Officers at all times. Each Department has the right to inspect any and all files stored in private areas of their Departments network or on individual Department-owned computers or storage media in order to assure compliance with policy and state and federal laws.
- I. Inappropriate use of the Internet and instant technology while on Departmental business may result in disciplinary actions, up to and including suspension and separation from their Department.
- J. All Department computer equipment is to be used for Departmental business and purposes in a professional and businesslike manner.

William H. Faust, Chairman
Queen Anne's County Fire & EMS Commission