

**BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS
FIRE DISTRICT NO. 1
TOWNSHIP OF RIVERSIDE
STANDARD OPERATING GUIDELINES**

SOG NUMBER:	PERSONNEL
DATE IMPLEMENTED: DATE REVISED:	TITLE: PERSONAL ONLINE POSTING

INTENT AND PURPOSE:

The District recognizes that socialization by personnel extends beyond the traditional means of gathering at the fire station or other locations after training, responses, meetings or other events.

Frequently, personnel choose to socialize and express themselves by posting personal and other information on the internet through personal websites, social media, blogs or chat rooms, by uploading content, or by making comments at other websites or blogs. Social media creates many opportunities to blur the line between personnel fire service lives and private lives. Problems can arise when a personal posting identifies or appears to be associated with the District, or when social media personal posting is utilized in a manner that obstructs or interferes with the mandated charge of the District, or is used in a manner that violates the rights of other personnel.

While the District encourages its personnel to engage in positive and constructive discourse, it must balance same with the potential detrimental and destructive impact that inappropriate discourse and communication will have upon the integrity of the fire service within the District. The District acknowledges the impact any restriction may have on the overall morale of the personnel, however, not to offend the high standards and principals expected by the District of its personnel, the Board finds and determines that guidelines need to be promulgated to afford a common sense approach to this problematic issue.

GUIDELINES AND CAUTIONS:

1. You are legally responsible for content you post;
2. You can be held personally liable for defaming others, revealing confidential information and privacy violations, among other things;
3. You post at your own risk. District insurance coverage does not cover personal postings;
4. Online postings are easy to dash off and virtually impossible to retract once published;
5. The courts have found online postings to be discoverable to attack your credibility in litigation;

6. Personal postings may result in you being sanctioned as a firefighter within the District. ALL District Policies, Rules and Regulations, Guidelines, Directives, Procedures and State and Federal mandates apply to anything you post. This means, for example, that you may not use personal postings to harass or threaten other personnel, reveal confidential information or violate other responsibilities entrusted to you as a public officer;
7. Personnel should keep in mind that postings will be read not only by those intended to receive same, but also by family, friends, other fire service personnel, fire service supervision and possibly by the public at large and various media agencies. Even if you post anonymously or under a pseudonym, your identity can be discovered relatively easily;
8. Personnel shall not post confidential information or violate fire service personnel or others' privacy. If you have concerns about the confidentiality or propriety of something you intend to post, check with a District official first;
9. If, either explicitly or implicitly, by statement or otherwise, you identify yourself as a firefighter within the District, you must clearly state that the views expressed in your post are your own and do not reflect the views of the District and/or Board;
10. You may not use District resources to create, maintain or post personal online communications;
11. You may not use District logos or other images, nor make false or misleading statements about the District, its philosophy or opinions;
12. Use your good judgment and discretion when requesting that co-firefighters, supervisors or subordinates join you on online social networks, or when responding to such requests. Keep in mind that, although you may be friends outside of the fire service, you are colleagues in the fire service and must address each other with respect and courtesy. A post or comment that might be appropriate among social friends may sound different when coming from a supervisor, subordinate or co-firefighter; and
13. Stop and think before you hit "publish". Remember, when you are not actively engaged in the fire service, you probably aren't thinking of the potential consequences of your post. You are always a public officer and must maintain an acceptable standard of conduct.