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S.O.P. #: PERSONNEL - 32

SUBJECT: SOCIAL MEDIA

DIVISION: EMERGENCY OPERATIONS

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Objective: The use of social media has become a ubiquitous part of modern society. This tool can be extremely effective for public safety entities in dispersing critical information during emergencies, as well as providing important public education. Conversely, the misuse of social media has the potential to negatively impact the Fire Department's ability to provide emergency services to the residents and visitors of Baltimore County. The following procedures are therefore intended to protect the integrity of the Fire Department and to ensure the continued effective relationship between the Fire Department and those it serves. This SOP should not be construed to supersede or conflict with the BCoFD Rules & Regulations Rule 1, section 1; SOP 400-15; or The Baltimore County Social Media Policy.

#### Section 1: Definitions

- A. **Social Media** - Web based form of communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content.
- B. **Speech** – Expression, communication or conduct with the intent to convey a message in circumstances where it is likely that the message would be understood.
- C. **Social Network**-A dedicated website or other application that enables users to communicate with each other by posting information, comments, messages, images, etc.
- D. **Post**- Any content that a person shares on a social media site. The act of publishing content on a site (Including, but not limited to, social media posts, responses to posts, comments attached to published articles, blogs, photos, videos, etc.)

#### Section 2: Official Social Media Use by Department members

- A. Department information is provided only on official web and social media platforms approved by the Fire Chief or the Chief's designee.
- B. Per Baltimore County's Social Media Use Policy, Department members are not authorized to post content to official web and social media platforms unless authorized by the Fire Chief or the Chief's designee. The Director of Media & Communications oversees the department's official social media platforms.
- C. Personnel are encouraged to submit media through their chain of command to be displayed on the County's various social media platforms.
- D. Pictures, video, or other information gathered or taken while on-duty or while performing department duties and functions are considered to be the property of the Baltimore County Fire Department and may not be used or released without the approval of the Fire Chief or his/her designee

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### Section 3: Personal Social Media Use by Department Members

- A. Members should be aware that there is no expectation of privacy when posting in any form to any social media or other web site. Information posted by members that is available via social media is, by its very nature, public, and therefore subject to the Rules and Regulations and SOPs of The Fire Department.
- B. Members may not attribute personal statements, opinions, or beliefs to Baltimore County or the Baltimore County Fire Department.
- C. Members may not display or post to any social media platform images of Fire Department uniforms, vehicles, equipment, facilities or other county-owned property that present the Fire Department in an unprofessional light.
- D. Members may not display or post to any social media platform any information, images, video or other content that may impact, or violate, the individually identifiable health information of any person who has been provided care by The Baltimore County Fire Department.
- E. Members may not display or post to any social media platform any information, images, video or other content regarding any ongoing or past internal investigation or criminal investigation.
- F. Members may not post any material that may be disruptive to the work environment because it impairs workplace discipline or control, impairs or erodes working relationships, creates dissension among co-workers, interferes with job performance, or obstructs operations and: (i) constitutes harassment, threats, advocacy of violence, hate speech, or libel; or (ii) violates the privacy rights of fellow employees.
- G. Obscene or sexually explicit language, images, acts and statements or other forms of speech that ridicule, malign, disparage and otherwise express bias against any person or group, including, but not exclusive of when they are distinguished by race, religion or gender is prohibited, as such speech may impact, or may be seen as impacting, the Fire Department's ability to serve its customers.
- H. If someone other than the member posts content on the member's social media page that would, if posted by the member, violate this Section 3, the member is strongly encouraged to delete the content.

#### Resources:

- <http://bcnet.co.ba.md.us/agencies/infotech/policies/socialmedia.html>
- <http://bcnet.co.ba.md.us/agencies/infotech/policies/index.html>