



<b>Somerville Police Department</b> 		<b>TYPE:</b> <b>GENERAL ORDER</b>		<b>POLICY NUMBER:</b> <b>410</b>	
		<b>Subject:</b> <b>Social Networking and Internet Sites</b>			
<b>Issuing Authority:</b> <b>Charles Femino</b> <b>Chief of Police</b>		<b>Signature:</b> 		<b>Effective Date:</b> May 13, 2021	
		<b>Number of Pages:</b> Page 1 of 6			
<b>Accreditation Standards (5<sup>th</sup> Edition)</b>		<input type="checkbox"/> New <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revised <input type="checkbox"/> Amended			
<b>Revision &amp; Reissued Dates:</b>	5/22/2015				

## Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to give employees guidance regarding appropriate content for social networking websites, web pages, and other electronically transmitted or hard-copied material with respect to the use of Somerville Police Department images, material, logos, or reference to those entities. The integrity of the department must be above reproach. Employee's personal sites are subject to admissibility in court or other proceedings. Therefore, all employees must avoid any conduct which would compromise the department's integrity and thus, undermine the public's confidence in the department.

## Policy

It is the policy of the Somerville Police Department that:

- A. Employees shall not, intentionally or unintentionally, bring discredit upon themselves or the department through electronic devices and/or social media.
- B. Employees shall not use electronic devices or social media to violate the policies, procedures, rules, or regulations of the department.
- C. Employees shall not disclose unauthorized or confidential information and/or materials using electronic devices or social media.

## Definitions

Chat: Digital text communications between two or more persons. The text is generally posted in the order sent for all participants to read.

Electronic Devices: Cellular telephones, iPads, digital cameras, mobile computers, mini-computers, desktop computers, and other devices used to store or transfer data, live audio or video, location, or other information.

Forum: Discussion areas on websites where people can post messages and make comments. Some forums allow users to upload images, audio, video, and other files.

Friends: On social networking sites, friends are individuals or organizations that you authorize to view the materials that you and others post to your site, and may allow you to view the materials posted on their site.

Peer-to-Peer: The connection of two or more individuals or organizations through a network. Peer-to-peer is often associated with file sharing.

Profiles: Information, images, audio, and/or video that a person or organization provides about themselves on a social networking site.

Public Domain: Materials or access available to the public without any special permission or access.

Social Media: A platform for individuals and organizations to interact and/or share information and electronic content. Examples include Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram, SnapChat, and Twitter.

Social Networking: A platform for individuals and organizations to communicate and share information with others at varying levels of their social network. Some well-known social networking sites are: Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. In addition, various "police" sites are now available for officers and potentially others to post information and video.

## **Procedures**

### **1. Department Authorized Social Media**

- A.** No employee shall create, maintain, or contribute to any social media site representing the Somerville Police Department unless authorized by the Chief of Police.
- B.** Official department profiles or the department profiles of individual employees reflect on the agency and staff. Official sites must be presented in a professional manner which will not discredit the department, its mission, or its employees.
- C.** Site content may be reviewed for compliance with this policy. Content which, in the opinion of the Chief of Police or their designee, is not in compliance with department policy or is inappropriate shall be ordered removed.
- D.** Official sites may include official information regarding the agency and employees. Official information includes, but is not limited to:
  - 1.** Date of hire
  - 2.** Years of service
  - 3.** Previous law enforcement employment

4. Previous military service
  5. Present military status
  6. Present department assignment
  7. Rank
  8. Specialty training
  9. Performance awards and achievements
  10. Educational achievements
- E. Individual employees may, but are not required to, authorize their general personal information to be presented. General personal information includes, but is not limited to:
1. Home city or town
  2. Present city or town of residence
  3. Age
  4. Present marital status, children
  5. Present military assignment
- F. Specific information about employees and their family members shall not be posted. Specific personal information includes, but is not limited to:
1. Dates of birth of employees or family members
  2. Addresses of employees or family members
  3. Personal telephone numbers, and email addresses
- G. No personal information other than official personal information may be posted about any employee against that employee's wishes.
- H. Only official department contact information shall be posted.
- I. Official department images are authorized to be published on official department sites. Official department images include, but are not limited to:
1. City seal
  2. Department patch
  3. Department badges
  4. Department personnel: On-duty photos and images of department personnel.  
**Note:** Photos of employees working undercover or in confidential assignments are considered confidential.
  5. Department buildings
  6. Department vehicles
- J. Department controlled images remain the property of the department. These images may be posted if authorized by the Public Information Officer. Department controlled images include, but are not limited to:
1. Photos and/or video taken while on-duty
  2. Photos and/or video taken in areas not open to the public

3. Photos and/or video of crime scenes and/or victims

K. Information considered confidential shall not be posted unless authorized by the Chief of Police.

L. The following content is prohibited:

1. Discrimination (race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, etc.)
2. Obscene materials
3. Harassment, including sexual harassment
4. Infringement of copyrighted material
5. Conducting of personal business, outside business, or promotion of private businesses
6. Expression of support of any political party or candidates

## 2. Department Sanctioned Social Media for Investigations

- A. No employee shall create, maintain, or contribute to any social media account for investigative purposes unless authorized by the employee's direct Supervisor.
- B. Only department equipment (computers, cellular phones) may be used. Employees shall not use personal equipment or devices when visiting sites for investigations.
- C. The use of false identities for investigative purposes must be authorized by the Chief of Police, Deputy Chief, or Detective Captain. The details of false identities and profiles used in investigations must be approved and documented by a supervisor in charge of the investigation before use, and treated as confidential.
- D. Most social networking sites require that users agree to abide by certain terms of service in order to use their site. Employees are responsible for understanding the terms of service for each site used. Many sites prohibit the use of false names and posting of false information on their site. Employees must be aware that if their true identity is discovered by a site host, their account may be disabled and the investigation may be compromised.
- E. Employees conducting on-line undercover investigations will meet periodically with a Lieutenant in CID, or the Detective Captain to review the conduct of the investigation. The purpose of the review is to ensure that the investigator is following agency policy and procedures and to protect the employee from later claims of secrecy and investigational misconduct.
- F. A log of all social media accounts used for investigative purposes will be kept and maintained by the Detective Captain. The individual cases in which the false identity was used will also be recorded in the log.

### 3. Personal Social Media

- A. The department will limit its inquiry into an employee's on-line/social media conduct to situations impacting or reflecting on the department, or affecting the employee's ability or fitness for duty.
- B. The department has a legitimate interest in preserving the public's trust and respect. An employee's off-duty personal relationships and conduct must not bring discredit to the employee or department, impact on the department's operation, affect the employee's ability to perform his/her job, or result in poor job performance.
- C. In social networking, chat, blog, and news comment sites, an employee's status as a police employee may become known either by: the employee making the affiliation known, by others making the employee's affiliation known, by disclosure from the site's host, by discovery in a civil or criminal proceeding, or by other methods. Employees must be aware that inappropriate comments, files, images, and other materials posted by them, or connected to their on-line profile, may damage their fitness to serve in the eyes of the public. It should be noted that some social media sites such as "LinkedIn" are used for the dual purpose of personal interactions and documenting professional experience. These types of websites correlate a person's profession to their statements online.
- D. Employees do not sever their relationship with the department at the end of their shift.** Employees must be aware that prohibited conduct, on or off-duty, and the disciplinary offense of "Conduct Unbecoming" applies to social networking, blogging, chat, and other on-line activity as well. Employees must be mindful that violation of department rules, regulations, policies, and procedures apply to on-line activities.
- E. During the course of a departmental investigation, employees may be ordered to provide the department, or its designated investigator, a listing of any social media and social networking platforms in which they participate.
- F. Text, images, photographs, and video of buildings, equipment, vehicles, and scenes affiliated with the department, and not within the public domain, must be authorized by the Chief of Police.
- G. Disseminating images and/or video of crime scenes and investigations, past and present, not within the public domain, is prohibited.
- H. Employees may identify themselves as department employees on any social networking site or on the Internet; however, this practice is highly discouraged except as part of official duties. Employees who appear in uniform or otherwise indirectly disclose their affiliation with the department have identified themselves as department employees.
- I. The following activities are prohibited on an employee's personal social networking sites whether they are public or private:
  - 1. Postings or material that detracts from the department's mission

2. Disclosing any confidential law enforcement missions (search warrants, warrant sweeps, investigations, etc.)
  3. Criminal Offender Record Information (C.O.R.I.) or other protected information
  4. Identifying employees of other law enforcement agencies (local, state, or federal) as law enforcement employees
  5. Identifying informants, victims, suspects, or witnesses to any crime or investigation to which this department is involved
  6. Disparaging remarks or materials targeting the City of Somerville or department employees or their family members
  7. Disparaging remarks or materials targeting persons, organizations, or businesses which the employee has dealt with due to department employment
  8. Harassment, including sexual harassment
  9. Criminal behavior
  10. Threats
  11. Photos, video, or other depictions of other employees without their permission
  12. Identifying other employees as members of this department without their permission
- J.** The following may be within an employee's speech rights, but could pose a risk of Conduct Unbecoming:
1. Profanity
  2. Rude, discourteous, or discouraging remarks
  3. Comments regarding personal drunkenness or heavy alcohol use.