

Social Media and Networking

Index Code: 303

Effective Date: 03/15/12 (Revised 1/4/2022)

I. Purpose

The purpose of this directive is to establish guidelines for employees who utilize personal web pages or social media/networking sites.

II. Policy

It is the policy of the Office of the Sheriff that employees are guaranteed their constitutional right to use personal web pages and social media/networking sites when appropriate. In doing so, it is expected that they will use good judgment, decency, and common sense both on and off duty.

The following guidelines in this directive will help ensure that employees use appropriate discretion in their use, and not discredit or disrespect themselves, other employees, the Office of the Sheriff, or the Queen Anne's County Government.

The absence of, or lack of explicit reference to, a specific site does not limit the extent of the application of the policy.

III. Definitions

For purposes of this directive, the following terms and associated definitions are applicable:

A. Website

A Website is any computerized document, file, menu, or page accessible on the Internet and/or World Wide Web.

B. Personal Website

A Personal Website is a Website created or configured by an individual for business, entertainment, or social purposes. This includes, but is not limited to, personal pages posted on social networking sites.

C. Blog

A Blog (short for web-log) is a personal online journal that is frequently updated and intended for general public consumption or viewing. Blogs are defined by their format, usually a series of entries posted to a single page in

reverse-chronological order. Blogs generally represent the personality of the author or reflect the purpose of the website that hosts the blog. Topics sometimes include brief philosophical musings, commentary on internet and other social issues, and links to other sites the author favors, especially those that support or reject a point posted.

D. Chat Room

A chat room is a website where users can actively email back and forth in a group setting. The website may be or may not be password-protected.

E. Social Media

Social Media is a category of Internet-based resources that integrate user-generated content and user participation.

F. Social Networks

Social Networks are on-line platforms where users can create profiles, share information, and socialize with others using a range of technologies.

IV. Background

A. The proper functioning of any law enforcement agency relies upon the public's confidence and trust in the agency, and its employees, to effectively protect and serve the public. Any matter which brings the agency or its employees into disrepute has the corresponding effect of reducing that confidence

and trust, and may impede the ability to work with and serve the public.

B. Professionalism is the most significant factor in providing the highest level of service to the public. While Office of the Sheriff employees have the right to use personal web pages and social networking sites while off duty, as employees they are public servants who are held to a higher standard than the general public with regards to ethical and moral conduct.

C. The Queen Anne's County Office of the Sheriff has the obligation to protect the reputation of the agency and its employees, as well as guard against liability and potential legal risk. Therefore, the Office of the Sheriff reserves the right to monitor web pages and social networking sites, to the extent the law allows. Employees are advised of the following:

1. Queen Anne's County Office of the Sheriff employees must be aware that the content of web pages and social networking sites can be subject to subpoena, and utilized in criminal and civil proceedings to impeach the employee's character or reputation.

2. Queen Anne's County Office of the Sheriff employees must realize that any reference to their employment with the Office of the Sheriff while using social networking sites could compromise their safety and the safety of their family or others.

3. All electronic means of communications accessed, created, received, or stored on equipment/systems owned, leased, or otherwise utilized by the Office of the Sheriff are the property of the Office of the Sheriff or the Queen Anne's County government and not the author, recipient, or user.

V. General Guidelines

A. The Office of the Sheriff supports employee's rights under the First Amendment guaranteeing freedom of speech. This includes the employee's right to have or use personal web pages or social networking sites to express themselves and seek communication with other individuals for personal relationships, friendship, or other correspondences.

B. When utilizing Websites and Social Media/Networking sites, employees should consider possible adverse consequences of inappropriate uses or postings, such as future employment, cross-examination in court proceedings and public as well as private embarrassment.

C. Employees are encouraged to seek the guidance of supervisors regarding any use or posting that may adversely reflect upon either the Office of the Sheriff, the Queen Anne's County government, the employee, a fellow employee, or a citizen.

VI. Procedures/Rules

A. Employees of the Office of the Sheriff are prohibited from accessing personal or social networking websites while on duty, unless the employee is conducting a criminal or administrative investigation previously approved by a supervisor.

B. Employees of the Office of the Sheriff will not release agency documents, records, or information, or discuss or divulge agency business, through social media networks/sites unless necessary for the performance of their duties with the Office of the Sheriff, and prior permission was obtained by their supervisor.

C. Employees of the Office of the Sheriff will not conduct any personal or agency related business through social media networks/sites which could have the potential of compromising an investigation, or unnecessarily reveal the identity of any suspect, victim, or witness.

D. Employees who have personal web pages, or who utilize other types of internet posting, which can be accessed by the public, will not:

1. Participate in or post any information including images which would likely have an adverse effect on the reputation of the employee, another employee, the Office of the Sheriff, or the Queen Anne's County government when that posting is related to a personal complaint and grievance about conditions of employment that are not matters of public concern.

2. Display photographs, videos, artwork, caricatures, or other depictions of agency badges, patches, uniforms, vehicles, or other property, which would likely have an adverse effect on the reputation of the employee, another employee, the Office of the Sheriff, or the Queen Anne's County government.

3. Display sexual, lewd, violent, racial, ethnically derogatory material, comments, pictures, artwork, images, video, or other references which would likely have an adverse effect on the reputation of the employee, another employee, the Office of the Sheriff, or the Queen Anne's County government.

XII. Cancellation: Directive dated 1/25/17

Sheriff Gary Hofmann

E. Employees are responsible for all postings on their personal web pages and social networking sites. Should a third party post information on an employee's social networking site which does not conform to the policies of the Queen Anne's County Office of the Sheriff, it is the employee's responsibility to remove the adverse posting immediately.

F. Prior to engaging in social networking, employees are strongly encouraged to review Office of the Sheriff policies, Queen Anne's County government policies, and check with their immediate supervisor for guidance.

VII. Security

A. Queen Anne's County Office of the Sheriff personnel will protect their agency User IDs and Passwords from unauthorized or unintended use and are encouraged to protect their personal User IDs and Passwords in the same manner.

B. Any employee of the Office of the Sheriff becoming aware of or having knowledge of a posting or any website or web page in violation of the provisions of this policy or any policy of the Office of the Sheriff, will notify their Division Commander immediately.

VIII. Office of the Sheriff Official Social Networking Websites

A. The Queen Anne's County Office of the Sheriff maintains its own social networking sites by way of a website and a social media page. The maintenance of those sites is the responsibility of the Sheriff's Administrative Assistant and the Public Information Officer.

B. Unauthorized postings to those sites are prohibited. This does not preclude personnel from posting comments as long as those comments are in compliance with Office of the Sheriff policies.

IX. CALEA References: None

X. Proponent Unit: Sheriff