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## ARTICLE III. RULES

### 3.22 Social Media

#### 3.22.1 Purpose

- a. Greensboro Fire Department members shall act professionally and responsibly and shall not use social media in any form that brings disrespect, disgrace or embarrassment to the fire department, the fire/rescue service or city government in any manner.

#### 3.22.2 Background

- a. The department endorses the secure use of social media to enhance communication and information exchange; streamline processes; foster productivity with its employees and exhibit department and fire service pride. This directive establishes the department's position on the use and management of social media and provides guidance on the management, administration, and oversight. This directive is not meant to address one particular form of social media; rather social media in general terms as technology will outpace our ability to discover emerging technology and create rules governing its use.
- b. This directive establishes departmental protocol to protect the property, identity, and reputation of the Greensboro Fire Department (department) and its employees. The department respects an employee's right to post and maintain personal websites, blogs, and other electronic media. Considering the growing use of the internet and limited regulations on its contents, the department requires GFD personnel to act in a prudent and professional manner with regard to website and internet postings that reference the department, its personnel, or its property.

#### 3.22.3 Conflict

- a. Nothing in this directive is intended to conflict with the City of Greensboro's policy "[Employee Use of Social Networks](#)" If in conflict, City Government policy will always prevail over departmental directives.

#### 3.22.4 Philosophy

- a. Earning and maintaining public trust and confidence is very important to our department. Social media provides a valuable means of assisting the department and its personnel in meeting community education, community information, fire prevention, and other related organizational and community objectives. This directive identifies possible uses that may be evaluated and utilized as deemed necessary by designated department personnel. The department also recognizes the role that social media tools may play in the personal lives of department personnel. The personal use of social media can have an effect on fire departmental personnel in their official capacity as firefighters. This directive is a means to provide guidance of a precautionary nature as well as restrictions and prohibitions on the use of social media by department personnel.
- b. Although there are many positive attributes of social media; improper use of social media can harm the department, city government and the fire and rescue service.

#### 3.22.5 Scope

- a. This directive is applicable to all employees of the Greensboro Fire Department, both sworn and civilian.

#### 3.22.6 Definitions

- a. Definitions for this department directive emulate the [City of Greensboro policy](#).

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### 3.22.7 Protocol

#### a. "Official" Departmental Websites and Weblogs will:

- i. Follow city policy rules and guidelines
- ii. Link to the department's official website
- iii. Target audience(s) such as the community, civic leadership, or potential recruits
- iv. Be administered by department employee(s) as directed by the Fire Chief
- v. Indicate that they are maintained by the department and shall have the department logo and/or scramble and contact information prominently displayed
- vi. Recognize that content shall adhere to applicable laws, regulations, and policies, including all information technology and records management policies of city government
- vii. Be subject to open public records laws
- viii. Apply relevant records retention schedules
- ix. Have content managed, stored, and retrieved to comply with open records laws and e-discovery laws and policies
- x. Acknowledge social media pages should state that the opinions expressed by visitors to the page(s) do not reflect the opinions of the department
- xi. State that social media pages comments will be monitored and that the department reserves the right to remove obscenities, off-topic comments, and personal attacks
- xii. State that any social media page content posted or submitted for posting is subject to public disclosure

#### b. Persons authorized to work with "Official" Departmental social media will:

- i. Conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the department and, accordingly, shall adhere to all department standards of conduct and observe conventionally accepted protocols and proper decorum.
- ii. Identify themselves as an employee of the department.
- iii. Secure express, written permission before posting, transmitting, or otherwise disseminate confidential information, including photographs or videos, related to department training, activities, or work-related assignments.
- iv. Not conduct political activities or private business.
- v. Not use personally owned devices to manage the department's social media activities or in the course of official duties without express written permission.
- vi. Be required to observe and abide by all copyright, trademark, and service mark restrictions in posting materials to electronic media.
- vii. Be accountable to their chain-of-command to act responsibly.

#### c. "Unofficial" Websites and Weblogs: If an employee or any group of department employees chooses to identify themselves as Greensboro Firefighters on any media outlet, including websites and blogs, they shall adhere to the following requirements:

1. Provide the Fire Chief with a written notification of their intent prior to establishing the media outlet. This written notification must provide the person(s) who are responsible for the media outlet, as these person(s) will be held accountable for adherence to the departmental directive. For any media outlet that was established prior to this directive being issued, employees must submit this same written notification of their intent, or action to the Fire Chief within 30 days of the effective date of this directive.
2. Uphold the department's value of respect for the individual and avoid making defamatory or disrespectful statements about employees, citizens, partners, vendors, or other agencies.

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3. Do not disclose any information that is confidential or proprietary to the City of Greensboro, the department, or any third party that has disclosed information to the department.
4. Act in a manner consistent with the city/department's public image, respect its traditions, and avoid using any department resources in a derogatory or unprofessional manner, such as the use of alcohol.
5. Do not let the maintenance of such sites interfere with the employee's job duties and responsibilities.
6. Act in accordance with all other City policies and department directives.
7. As public employees, department personnel are cautioned that their speech either on or off duty, and in the course of their official duties that has a nexus to the employee's professional duties and responsibilities may not necessarily be protected speech under the First Amendment.
  - a. This may form the basis for corrective action if deemed detrimental to the department.
  - b. Department employees should assume that their speech and related activity on social media sites will reflect upon their position within the department.
8. Department employees shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any information to which they have access as a result of their employment without written permission from a duly promoted chief officer.
9. Department employees are cautioned not to do the following:
  - a. Display department logos, uniforms, or official GFD paraphernalia on personal web pages without prior written permission.
  - b. When using social media, department employees should be mindful that their speech and action becomes part of the World Wide Web.
10. Adherence to the department's code of conduct is required in the personal use of social media. In particular, department employees are prohibited from the following:
  - a. Speech containing obscene or sexually explicit language, images, or acts and statements or other forms of speech that ridicule, malign, disparage, or otherwise express bias against any race, any religion, or any protected class of individuals.
  - b. Department employees may not divulge information gained by reason of their authority; make any statements, speeches, appearances, and endorsements; or publish materials that could reasonably be considered to represent the views or positions of the department without express authorization.
  - c. Department employees should be aware that they may be subject to civil litigation for publishing or posting false information that harms the reputation of another person, group, or organization otherwise known as defamation to include: ' publishing or posting private facts and personal information about someone without their permission that has not been previously revealed to the public, is not of legitimate public concern, and would be offensive to a reasonable person; using someone else's name, likeness, or other personal attributes without that person's permission for an exploitative purpose; or publishing the creative work of another, trademarks, or certain

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confidential business information without the permission of the owner.

11. Department employees should be aware that privacy settings and social media sites are constantly in flux, and they should never assume that personal information posted on such sites is protected.
12. Department employees should expect that any information created, transmitted, downloaded, exchanged, or discussed in a public online forum may be accessed by the department at any time without prior notice.
13. Do not post unauthorized content. This includes, but is not limited to:
  - a. The official department's emblem or "GFD Scramble" which are both "service marked" and may only be used with express written permission from the Greensboro Fire Chief.
  - b. Items such as illegally downloaded music, videos, photos, and/or other Copyrighted materials.
  - c. Photos, videos, audios, etc. taken at incidents or other fire/city activities unless authorized to be used. Any duly promoted Chief Officer is empowered to approve appropriate media.
  - d. Post no photos depicting personnel in department uniform without authorization from a duly promoted Chief Officer.
  - e. The person taking the photograph is responsible for the photograph. Any re-use of a photograph requires identifying the source.
14. Use the following statement (verbatim) on the site:
  - a. *"This website is independently operated and maintained by \_\_\_\_\_ . Any information contained on this site is not endorsed or approved by the City of Greensboro, North Carolina and its fire department. The views presented do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of the Greensboro Fire Department, City of Greensboro, or its leadership."*
15. Sites that are covered by this directive include, but are not limited to:
  - a. Group or Team websites, which members of the department maintain independently and may or may not be associated with or linked to the official department website.
  - b. All web applications (i.e. personal network, social network, or "social website" pages, which individual employees maintain. These applications include, but are not limited to: "Facebook,", "Pinterest", "YouTube" and "Twitter").

**3.22.8 Use of wireless devices for social media on duty.** Any member of the Greensboro Fire Department SHALL NOT use any smart phone or other electronic wireless device for any social media purpose whatsoever while responding enroute to an emergency call or while on scene of an incident when professional services are needed or during departmental training sessions. Any crew leader or supervisor in the department is expected to ensure all personnel are fully focused when delivering emergency services.

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### 3.22.9 **Electronic Property of the Greensboro Fire Department**

- a. The department maintains confidential records on its employees, customers, patients and its vendors.
- b. Such information shall remain private and protected and shall only be used for legitimate business reasons.
- c. Under no circumstances will an employee of the department disclose this information without proper authorization.
- d. Information in any city/departmental database (such as Firehouse and Lawson) is private, protected information. Any database that is owned and maintained by the city is also considered protected.
- e. Personnel information is also private and protected and is governed by [North Carolina General Statute 160A-168](#)
- f. Beyond the above examples, images such as photographs, diagrams and scanned signatures, information of other entities (non-employees), personal information of emergency contacts and business information of properties is also protected. Please note that this list is not all-inclusive.
- g. Requests for Information
- h. Some department and/or personal employee information is public record in accordance with NCGS 160A-168 as noted above.
- i. Other records are private under all circumstances.
- j. To ensure that all requests for information are handled consistently and in accordance with appropriate regulations, all inquiries must be directed to a Deputy Chief or the Fire Chief upon receipt.

### 3.22.10 **Violations**

- a. Reporting violations.
  - i. Any employee becoming aware of or having knowledge of a posting or of any website or webpage in violation of the provision of this directive shall notify his or her supervisor immediately for appropriate follow-up action.
  - ii. Violation of this social media directive may result in corrective action up to an including dismissal from employment with the City of Greensboro.

### 3.22.11 **Footnote**

- a. The model social media policy developed and distributed by the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) as guidance for fire departments across the United States was used as the basis for this departmental directive. This directive was discussed through a departmental advisory committee, and has been reviewed at the city government level, IAFF Local 947, the North Carolina School of Government staff and by peer fire chiefs from other North Carolina cities. However, it is recognized that this topic is dynamic and this directive will require routine maintenance to address emerging needs and issues. The purpose remains solid.