

GLOUCESTER TOWNSHIP FIRE DISTRICTS #2 AND #4 SHARED SERVICES PROGRAM JOINT ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY						
TITLE:	SOCIAL NETWORKING				NEW	REVISED
					X	
ORDER #:	J.A.P. 23-002	Initial Issue Date:	8/1 /2023	Revised Issue Date:		
Approved by Fire District #2 Chairman George Genzel Fire District 2 Chief Millisky President Tom Ardecki			Date: 7/12/2023	Approved by Fire District #4 Chairman David Vannoni Fire District 4 Chief Cipriano President Jason Stott		Date:
POLICY REVIEW SCHEDULE:	3 MONTHS	6 MONTHS	1 YEAR	2 YEARS	OTHER	
			X		And As Needed	
Related Policies	J.A.P. 22-002 Digital Imaging					
Applicable Laws	N/A					
Replaces	GTFD2 A.P. 20-4 Social Networking					

1. Purpose

1.1 It is the policy of Gloucester Township Fire Districts 2 and 4 to utilize electronic social media to advise the public on matters of concern, foster community outreach efforts, and to provide a mechanism for public feedback while safeguarding the districts' professionalism.

1.2 This policy governs personal and organizational use of the Internet, the World Wide Web, and social media as a medium of communication that impacts the efficiency and morale of the districts. The guidance and direction within this policy is intended to establish the boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate use of social media by fire department personnel in order to protect members' careers while preserving the public's confidence in the department. Nothing in this policy is intended to unlawfully restrict a member's right to discuss, as a private citizen, matters of public concern to the extent protected by the First Amendment or to engage in concerted activity with co-workers to the extent protected by collective bargaining laws.

1.3 This policy is for internal use only and does not enlarge an employee's legal duty or civil liability in any way. This policy does not create a duty to act or a higher duty of care, with respect to third party civil claims against employees or the districts. A violation of this policy, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by districts for non-judicial administrative action in accordance with any and all applicable laws, regulations or contractual language governing employee discipline and any applicable section or sections of current collective bargaining agreements.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all elected fire commissioners, all membership classifications within any fire company authorized to operate within the districts, all civilian employees and career firefighters employed by the districts and any other firefighter approved to function with a company or unit under the authority.

3. Definitions

Authorized: The term authorized shall be defined as having official permission or approval from those representatives outlined within Section 4.4 of this policy.

Avatar: A computer user's representation of himself/herself, or an alter ego.

Blog: A series of electronic entries, diary or commentary, written by one or more persons in an on-line journal that can permit visitors to post responses, reactions or comments. The term is an abbreviated version of 'web-log'.

Comments: Responses to a blog post, news article, social media entry or other social networking post.

Commenting: The act of creating and posting a response to a blog post, news article, social media entry or other social networking post. Commenting can also entail the act of posting an original composition to an unrelated post or article.

Concerted Activity: Activity undertaken jointly by employees for the purpose of union or organization, collective bargaining, or other mutual aid or protection, certain aspects of which are protected by federal and state labor laws. For purposes of this policy, the term "Concerted Activity" applies only to career firefighters and/or other employees protected by a collective bargaining agreement.

District: Gloucester Township Fire District 2 (GTFD 2) and / or Gloucester Township Fire District 4 (GTFD 4)

District owned images or audio recordings: Photographs, digital photographs, digital images, video recordings, audio recordings or electronic files containing a graphic image or series of images, as well as any digital reproductions or copies of such photographs, digital photographs, digital images, video recordings, audio recordings, or files, owned by the fire districts by virtue of the fact that they were taken and/or created in the course of fire district and/or fire company business. This definition expressly includes the live streaming of imagery whether or not recorded at the time of creation.

Forum – An online discussion site.

Harassment: Is the systematic and/or continued unwelcome actions of one party or group intended to demean, disparage, threaten, intimidate, bully, or alarm another party or group.

Hate speech: Is speech that attacks a person or group on the basis of attributes including race, creed, color, national origin, nationality, ancestry, age, sex/gender (including pregnancy), marital status, civil union status, domestic partnership status, familial status, religion, affectional or sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, atypical hereditary cellular or blood trait, genetic information, liability for service in the Armed Forces of the United States, disability, or any other legally recognized protected basis under federal, state or local laws, regulations or ordinances, indicating a level of intolerance or hostility that is incompatible with a commitment to serve all members of the community. Included is speech that threatens violence or harm directed toward any person or group; encourages others to commit violence or harm directed

toward any person or group; or threatens to or encourages others to withhold public safety services from any person or group.

Identity: An online identity, Internet identity or Internet persona that a social networking user establishes. This can be a real name, an alias, a pseudonym or a creative description.

Internet posting: Includes both personal postings and accounts of agency activity on social networks, forums, blogs, wikis, pages, etc.

Member: All elected fire commissioners, all membership classifications within any fire company authorized to operate within the districts as well as all civilian employees and career firefighters employed by the districts.

Mobile social networking: Social networking using a mobile phone or other cellular based device.

Organizational: Shall refer to a District as defined by this policy or any fire company authorized to operate within the aforementioned districts.

Page: The specific portion of a social media website where content is displayed and managed by an individual or individuals with administrator rights.

Personal webpages or websites: See social media.

Post: The content a person shares on a social media site or blog; an entry to any type of computerized bulletin board; the act of publishing content on a social media site.

Posting: The act of creating, uploading, editing or adding to any social media outlet. This includes text, photographs, audio, video or any other multimedia file.

Profile: Information that a user provides about himself or herself on a social networking site.

Social media: Web-based technology tools that enable people to communicate electronically via the Internet and the World Wide Web to share information and resources. Social media can include the sharing and exchange of information in the form of electronic data, text, audio, video, images, podcasts, web casts, and other multimedia electronic communications.

Social networking: The act of connecting to others through the use of social media.

Speech: Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, videotape, or related forms of communication.

Spokesperson for the District(s): Any member who makes a statement, on behalf of District(s), in his/her capacity as an employee or member of a district or districts or in such a way that it may reasonably be attributed to the district or districts.

Web 2.0: The second generation of the World Wide Web focused on shareable, user-generated content, rather than static web pages. Some use this term interchangeably with social media.

Wiki: Web page(s) that can be edited collaboratively.

4. POLICY

4.1 The proper functioning of any fire and emergency service organization depends upon the public's confidence and trust in the individual firefighters, officers, and district as a whole to carry out our mission. Any matter which brings discredit to individual firefighters, officers, or the district has the corresponding effect of reducing public confidence and trust in our organization, thus impeding our ability to work with and serve the public. Professionalism is a significant factor in high level performance which in turn builds the public's confidence and trust.

4.2 In addition, when the public calls upon us for help they have a right to expect that the details of their private lives and affairs will be kept confidential, and not released except as

permitted by law. The public also has a right to expect that the Districts' services will be provided to all members of the community without regard to race, creed, color, national origin, nationality, ancestry, age, sex/gender (including pregnancy), marital status, civil union status, domestic partnership status, familial status, religion, affectional or sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, atypical hereditary cellular or blood trait, genetic information, liability for service in the Armed Forces of the United States, disability, or any other legally recognized protected basis under federal, state or local laws, regulations or ordinances. When the public lacks confidence in a district's ability to provide services, they may delay reporting emergencies or refuse to report emergencies resulting in unnecessary death and destruction, thereby causing actual harm and/or disruption to the mission and function of the Districts.

4.3 It is the policy of the Districts to respect the Constitutional and statutory rights of all members and the public. While all members have the right to use personal social networking pages or sites, members are public servants who are held to a higher standard than the general public with regard to standards of conduct and ethics. All members have an affirmative obligation while using social media to ensure they do not become viewed as spokespersons for the districts except when authorized to serve in such capacity. It is the policy of the Districts that all members will maintain a level of professionalism in both on-duty and off-duty conduct that is consistent with the mission of the Districts and in a way that will not cause actual harm or disruption to the mission and functions of the districts. The Districts reserve the right to review all public social media that is posted by members.

4.4 The District or fire company representative with authority to approve the described activity is dependent upon the activity type. Members holding the following job titles are authorized to permit the taking of photographs and/or recording of video, and the subsequent posting to personal or district / fire company social media in the listed circumstances:

- A. Emergency Incidents / Training: Fire Chief or the Fire Chief's Designee.
- B. Fire Company Related Activities: Fire Company President or the President's Designee.
- C. Board of Fire Commissioners Meetings or Activities: Board Chairman or the Chairman's Designee

4.5 INTRODUCTION

Fire department members are cautioned that while acting as a spokesperson for the fire department, including when engaged in social networking in such a way that their speech may reasonably be attributed to the department, their speech is not automatically entitled to First Amendment protection. This may involve speech that occurs both on-duty and off-duty. For this reason, members should ensure their personal social networking activities are conducted as private citizens.

4.6 PROCEDURE:

While engaged in personal and / or organizational social networking activities:

- 4.6.1 No member shall post, disseminate, or in any other way broadcast as a private citizen on a matter of public concern in such a way as to cause actual harm or disruption to the mission and functions of the district or districts. Examples of conduct that courts have concluded may cause actual harm or disruption to the mission and functions of the district or districts include posts that:

- A. Impair harmony among co-workers, volunteer and career staff, neighboring districts, fire companies, departments or operational partners.
 - B. Have a detrimental impact on close working relationships among members, coworkers or volunteer and career members.
 - C. Have a detrimental impact on the relations between the department and the community we protect, including speech that threatens violence or harm directed toward any person or group; encourages others to commit violence or harm directed toward any person or group; or threatens to or encourages others to withhold public safety services from any person or group.
 - D. Are contrary to the districts' regulations and harmful to the proper functioning of the district(s).
- 4.6.2 Members may post, disseminate or broadcast on a matter of public concern as a spokesperson for the district(s) only with permission of the designated district or fire company representative as provided in 4.4 of this policy. Members shall at all times exercise diligence to avoid holding themselves out as spokespersons for the department except when duly authorized. The use of departmental titles, fire department logos, fire department owned images, or identification as a member of the department in such a way as to create the impression that the member is acting as a spokesperson for the department, or that the posting is attributable to the department, is prohibited unless duly authorized.
- 4.6.3 Use of the following is strongly discouraged in an effort to be able to clearly differentiate between member social media activity on behalf of the District(s) and activity as a private person.
 - A. Use of screennames such as CLFD_Captain; S82_FF; FDCL_Chauffeur; E88_FF, Chief_84 and any other screenname that may cause a posting or email to reasonably be attributed to the, district(s) is strongly discouraged.
 - B. Email addresses/screennames that refer to or include portions organization names, i.e. Chews Landing Fire Department, Chews Volunteer Fire Company #1, Gloucester Township Fire District #2, Blackwood Fire Company, Blackwood Volunteer Fire Company #1, Gloucester Township Fire District 4, Gloucester Township Squad 88 or any variation thereof.
 - B. Signature lines in emails that include rank, title, and affiliation with the district(s).
- 4.6.4 Creation or use of a web site that includes the name, logo, patch, photos of apparatus, and/or information that creates the impression that the site may be an official fire district site is prohibited unless duly authorized.
- 4.6.5 Members are prohibited from posting, disseminating, or broadcasting fire district matters that are not of a public concern, unless doing so is for the purpose of engaging in concerted activities relative to workplace issues. Specifically, this provision does not prohibit members from discussing terms and conditions of employment among themselves or with non-members for the purpose of engaging in concerted activities. However, members must ensure that while engaging in concerted activities they are not perceived as being a spokesperson for the district(s) nor that the posting could be

attributable to the district(s).

- 4.6.6 Members shall not post, disseminate or broadcast information that is known to be false, deceptive, libelous, slanderous, misleading or causes harm to others, including speech that constitutes hate speech or harassment; nor shall members discuss protected or confidential matters of the district(s) including:
- A. matters that are under investigation
 - B. patient and employee information protected by HIPAA and/or medical confidentiality laws; or
 - C. personnel matters that are protected from disclosure by law.
 - D. This provision does not prohibit members from discussing terms and conditions of employment among themselves or with non-members for the purpose of engaging in concerted activities.
- 4.6.7 Members shall not post, disseminate, or broadcast department owned images or audio recordings unless authorized to do so, or unless such images or audio are available to the public pursuant to the public records law. If such images or audio have been released by the department as public records, members shall ensure that their subsequent use of such information is done in their capacity as private citizens, and not as spokespersons for the department unless authorized to do so.
- 4.6.8 Members shall maintain an appropriate level of professionalism and conduct so as not to post, disseminate, or broadcast in a manner that causes actual harm or disruption to the mission and functions of this department. This provision is not intended to restrict the content of a posting that is protected by the First Amendment or collective bargaining laws, but rather is intended to apply to the use of vulgar, obscene, or indecent terms; the posting of materials of a pornographic nature; the use of threatening, harassing, or intimidating language; the use of speech that threatens or incites attacks against people or groups on the basis of attributes including race, creed, color, national origin, nationality, ancestry, age, sex/gender (including pregnancy), marital status, civil union status, domestic partnership status, familial status, religion, affectional or sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, atypical hereditary cellular or blood trait, genetic information, liability for service in the Armed Forces of the United States, disability, or any other legally recognized protected basis under federal, state or local laws, regulations or ordinances; or engaging in illegal activities.
- 4.6.9 Members are prohibited from using social media to harass, bully, discriminate, threaten violence or harm, or retaliate against a co-worker. Harassment, bullying, discrimination, making threats of violence or harm, or retaliation against a co-worker that would not be permissible in the workplace is not permissible between co-workers through social media, even if it is done off-duty, from home or using personal computers or devices.

4.6.10 PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- A. Because social media is an emerging form of communication, the district permits members to engage in limited social media activity in the workplace and/or while on duty, similar to receiving a personal text message or a telephone call of limited duration. Members choosing to do so are expected and required to use proper judgment and discretion, recognizing that even very brief periods of social media activity can collectively amount to significant periods of time. Supervisors are authorized to restrict or prohibit workplace / on-duty social media activity, as appropriate.
- B. Members are prohibited from engaging in personal social networking activities that involves the recording or transmission of work-related imagery or audio while on duty; while on fire department property; while in fire department facilities; while on or in fire department apparatus or vehicles; or while in uniform or while wearing such portion of the uniform so as to make the member identifiable as a member of the Districts. This provision does not apply to department approved recordings or transmissions. As pertains to this provision, the term imagery includes still photos or video taken and posted, disseminated or broadcasted via the internet immediately or within a short period of time thereafter, as well as live streaming imagery.
- C. Members are further advised that social media activities that involve the posting or discussion of incidents or work-related matters online may make the communications subject to the state's public record laws creating legal obligations for them and the department. To the extent such postings and discussions trigger the public records laws members are required to comply with the department's record retention policy.
 - 1. This provision shall not prohibit personal communications between a member and members of his/her immediate family that involve Facetime, Skype, Zoom, Google Meets, or similar platforms.
 - 2. This provision shall not prohibit members from using social media to engage in concerted activities relative to workplace issues as protected by collective bargaining laws.
 - 3. This provision shall not apply to the activities described in Section D – Personal Photo Exception of the Digital Imaging Policy (JAP-22-002) providing the activity meets all provisions of the section.
- D. Visiting or participating in sites that bring discredit to the Districts and / or fire companies or to a member, or promoting misconduct, whether on or off duty, may be investigated through a criminal, disciplinary or other administrative investigation.
- E. Barring state law or binding employment contracts to the contrary, all members shall abide by the following when using social media/networking.

1. Members shall not post information pertaining to any other employee or member of the Districts without their expressed permission.
2. Members can identify themselves as representatives of their agency however the member's actions are reflective of their agency and shall conform to the standards outlined within this policy.
3. Self-identification can include the acknowledgment in a user profile for work experience, job title, etc. by identifying oneself as a member of the Districts / Fire Companies. If members identify their employment or membership with their agency, they assume the responsibility for representing the Districts and their fire company in a professional manner.
4. Members shall not express personal opinions as official agency policy or position.
5. If a member self-identifies as a member of the District(s) or fire companies, AT A MINIMUM, he/she shall post on his/her social networking site a disclaimer clarifying that the opinions expressed are solely those of the member and do not represent the views of their agency.
 - a. Example: "The posts on this site including, but not limited to images, links and comments left by readers, are my own and do not represent my employer's positions, strategies, or opinions'.
6. Members shall not display or post any image or comment involving a reference concerning any form of bias, hatred, or derogatory comments about any protected class of persons.
7. All members are prohibited from using logos, badges, seals, uniforms, vehicles, equipment or any item or symbol that is affiliated with the Districts and fire companies in an inappropriate or offensive manner or in a way that is in violation of any rule, regulation or general order of the Districts and / or fire companies.

F. Members are free to express themselves as private citizens on social media sites to the degree that their speech does not impair any working relationships within the Districts and fire companies for which loyalty and confidentiality are important, impede the performance of duties, impair discipline and harmony among coworkers or negatively affect the public perception of the Districts and fire companies.

4.6.11 ORGANIZATIONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

A. Sanctioned presence: The Districts and any fire company authorized to operate within the Districts may establish websites and social media venues for use as outlined in Paragraph 1.1 of this policy.

1. This provision shall retroactively apply to any previously established websites and social media venues.

B. Any Fire District social media site or page must be approved by the Chairman of the Board of Fire Commissioners or the Chairman's designee, hereinafter

referred to as authorized representatives. The Chairman shall designate personnel to manage the department's social media. The designee is authorized to access such media from personally owned devices.

C. Any fire company social media site or page must be approved by the fire company's Chief and / or President, subject to review and approval by the applicable District's Board of Fire Commissioners, hereinafter referred to as authorized representatives. The Chief and / or President shall designate personnel to manage all sanctioned websites and social media venues. The designee is authorized to access such media from personally owned devices.

D. Organizational social media pages shall clearly indicate they are maintained by the applicable fire district and / or fire company and shall have the entities contact information prominently displayed. Each social media page will also include an introductory statement that clearly specifies the purpose and scope of the agency's presence on the website.

E. Consistent with Paragraph 1.1 of this policy, use of social media may include, but not be limited to advising the public of fire department activities, providing fire prevention tips, posting public safety and emergency management related notifications and bulletins and providing information relating to community relations activities and member recruitment.

F. The following activity is prohibited:

1. Posting, transmitting or otherwise disseminating confidential information.
2. Political activity or private business.
3. Violation of any copyright, trademark and service mark whenever posting materials to electronic media.
4. Assume the identity of another or an identity that could be assumed to be factual (e.g., alias, penname, avatar, etc.) while posting any comments.

G. The Chairman of the Board of Fire Commissioners, as well as fire company Chiefs and Presidents will ensure that fire district and / or fire company social media venues are monitored and maintained consistent with the Paragraph 1.1 of this policy.

H. Authorized representatives of the Districts and Fire Companies reserve the right to review all public social media posts and remove or direct the removal of material deemed inappropriate.

1. Upon request, the Chief and / or fire company President must provide the Chairman of their District's Board of Fire Commissioners with the name of anyone authorized to create, edit or otherwise post to any organizational website or social media venue.
2. Upon request, the Chief and / or the fire company President must provide the Chairman of their District's Board of Fire Commissioners with the name of anyone creating, editing or otherwise making a specific post to any organizational website or social media venue.

5 POLICY VIOLATIONS:

5.1 Violations of this policy may result in discipline up to and including termination

- A. Disciplinary matters involving career personnel will be administered by the Fire Commissioner designated as the Director of Personnel of the applicable District or his/her designee in accordance with New Jersey Civil Service law and any applicable provision of an applicable collective bargaining agreement.
- B. Disciplinary matters involving civilian employees will be administered by the Fire Commissioner designated as the Director of Personnel of the applicable District or his/her designee in accordance with New Jersey Civil Service law.
- C. Disciplinary matters involving a member of a fire company authorized to operate within the districts will be administered by the Fire Chief, Company President, and/or the fire company executive committee subject to review and approval of the Director of Personnel of the applicable District or his / her designee.

5.2 Violations of this policy by a service provider, or a representative of a service provider, contracted by a District or the Districts, or a fire company or fire companies authorized to operate within the Districts may result in the termination of any contract with the provider.