



Sheridan Police Department
Policies and Procedures
8.4
Chapter 8 – Employee Conduct
Section 4 – Social Networking

Date: January 1, 2013
Updated: 11/08/2021

Signature:

The use of internet social networking sites (MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) is a popular activity; however, employees must be mindful of the negative impact of inappropriate postings upon themselves, the department and its relationship with the community.

8.4.1 General Use

- A. All police department personnel shall use computers, computer applications, computer programs, internet resources and network/internet communications in a responsible, professional, ethical, and lawful manner while recognizing that off-duty conduct of employees has a potential impact on department image.
- B. The use of personal social media or electronic gaming shall be prohibited while on duty, with the exception of allocated breaks or meal times. No personal social media accounts will be accessed through department computers unless permission has been given by a supervisor.
 - 1. Social media can be useful for investigations from time to time. Personal social media accounts should not be used for police business. Alias accounts shall only be used with permission from a supervisor. Any alias accounts created for law-enforcement shall be kept on file with the officer's supervisor.

8.4.2 Using Social Media

Department personnel shall abide by the following when using social media.

- A. Department personnel are free to express themselves as private citizens on social media sites to the degree that their speech does not:
 - 1. Impair working relationships of this department for which loyalty and confidentiality are important; or
 - 2. Impede the performance of duties, impair discipline and harmony among coworkers, or negatively affect the public perception of the department.
- B. As public employees, department personnel are cautioned that speech on or off-duty, made pursuant to their official duties (that is, that owes its existence to the employee's professional duties and responsibilities) is not protected speech under the First Amendment and may form the basis for discipline if deemed detrimental to the department. Department personnel should assume that their speech and related activity on social media sites will reflect upon their position and this department.
- C. Department personnel shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any information to which they have access as a result of their employment without written permission from the chief of police or his or her designee. This includes but is not limited to:

1. Photographs or depictions of themselves dressed in uniform and/or displaying official identification, patches, badges, or other department equipment or property;
 2. Photographs or information from any crime or accident scene; or
 3. Pictures or videos of official department training, activities, or work-related assignments.
- D. Officers who are, or who may reasonably be expected to work in undercover operations are cautioned against posting any form of visual or personal identification.
- E. When using social media, department personnel should be mindful that their speech becomes part of the worldwide electronic domain. Therefore, adherence to the department's code of conduct, code of ethics and sexual harassment policy are required in the personal use of social media. In particular, department personnel are prohibited from the following:
1. Using speech containing obscene or sexually explicit language;
 2. Posting images depicting obscene or sexually explicit acts;
 3. Posting images, statements or other forms of communication that ridicule, malign, disparage, or otherwise express bias against any race, any religion, or any protected class of individuals; or
 4. Posting images, statements or other forms of communication reflecting behavior that would reasonably be considered reckless or irresponsible.
- F. Engaging in speech prohibited by this policy may provide grounds for undermining or impeaching an officer's testimony in criminal proceedings. Department personnel thus sanctioned are subject to discipline up to and including termination.
- G. Department personnel should be aware that they may be subject to civil litigation for:
1. Publishing or posting false information that harms the reputation of another person, group, or organization (defamation);
 2. 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;
 3. Using someone else's name, likeness, or other personal attributes without that person's permission for an exploitative purpose; or
 4. Publishing the creative work of another, trademarks, or certain confidential business information without the permission of the owner.
- H. Department personnel 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.
- I. Department personnel 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.
- J. Employees are reminded to exercise good judgment and demonstrate personal accountability when choosing to participate on social-networking sites. Use of these types of sites while on duty shall be restricted to official department business only. Employees need to comply with the City of Sheridan Electronic Use Policy (City of Sheridan Employee Handbook) and recognize that all time and effort spent on their personal site should be done on their personal time and should not interfere with their job duties.
- K. Any employee becoming aware of or having knowledge of a posting or of any website or web page in violation of the provision of this policy shall notify his or her supervisor immediately for follow-up action.

- L. During an administrative investigation, employees may be ordered to provide the department with access to social networking sites when the subject of the investigation is directly, narrowly, and specifically related to an employee's performance or ability to perform his or her function within the department, or when the subject in the investigation is potentially adverse to the operation, morale, or efficiency of the department.