



PHOTOGRAPHY AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

I. Purpose and Scope:

The Mission Fire Department (MFD) acknowledges that improper use of social media may lead to negatively affecting the public's perception of the Department's ability to provide fire and life safety services to the community we serve.

This policy provides guidance to all MFD personnel, sworn and civilian, by clarifying the boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate use of social media by Mission Fire Department personnel in alignment with the mission of the Department. This Policy is not intended to unlawfully restrict fire department personnel's right to discuss as a private citizen any matters of public concern.

II. Definitions

- A. **Account Handles:** Account user names used throughout different social media platforms to identify the user. Handles are public user names that identify people/entities online.
- B. **Authorized MFD Social Media Accounts:** Approved social media sites that utilize the brand, likeness, and or identity of MFD. These sites are managed or overseen by the Fire Chief, the PIO, and hold a verified status with the account host.
- C. **Camera:** Device used to capture still and video images. Cameras may be departmental issued or privately owned and may be affixed to apparatus, personal protective equipment, or hand-held.
- D. **Electronic Device:** Any device from which information, data, pictures, video, and audio can be transmitted to a personal computer, PDA, cell phone, smartphone, tablet, or any other device that may, can, or might connect to the internet and or any social media
- E. **Department-Sponsored Activities:** Any MFD activities, which includes but are not limited to, Graduations, Promotional Ceremonies, Groundbreaking ceremonies, New Apparatus ceremonies, Station openings and dedication



Mission Fire Department Operations Manual
Section: Administrative Policies

Number: 100.11.00
Date: November 23, 2020
Revised:

ceremonies, Open Houses, Parades, Community events, Career Days, Award/Recognition Events, and Funerals, as indicated by the Fire Chief or his designee.

- F. **Podcast or Blog:** A recorded program or website containing a writer's or group of writers' own experiences, observations, opinions, etc., and often contain images and links to other websites, podcasts, forums, or blogs.
- G. **Harassment:** A systematic and/or continued unwelcomed actions of one party or group intended to demean, threaten, intimidate, or alarm another party or group.
- H. **Multi-media:** A combination of sound, video, graphics, and text for expressing ideas and communicating.
- I. **Networking site:** A dedicated site or other application that enables users to connect with each other based on professional or personal profiles.
- J. **Post:** Content an individual shares on social media, website, or the act of publishing content anywhere online.
- K. **Social Media:** A category of Internet-based resources that integrate user-generated content and user participation. This includes, but is not limited to, social networking sites, microblogging sites, photo, and video sharing sites, Wikipedia, blogs, and news sites.
- L. **Social Media platform:** Any web-based technology used for community-based input, interaction, content-sharing, blogs, and collaborations.
- M. **Social networking site:** A dedicated site or other application that enables users to communicate with each other by posting information, comments, messages, videos, images, etc.
- N. **Speech:** Is the expression of communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken word, written text, expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, videos, or other related forms of communication.



Mission Fire Department Operations Manual
Section: Administrative Policies

Number: 100.11.00
Date: November 23, 2020
Revised:

- O. **Unauthorized Spokesperson:** An MFD employee who makes a statement on behalf of the Department in his/her capacity as an employee or member of the department; or in such a way that it may be reasonably attributed to the Department.
- P. **Websites:** A connected group of pages on the world wide web and regarded as a single entity and commonly maintained by a single organization or person.

III. Policy

- A. No firefighter shall be actively engaged in any form of social media, or using a camera or electronic device during the entirety of any dispatched emergency event or detail, from the time of such dispatch or detail, until such a time as the apparatus is marked back in service and on the station. The exception to this would be anyone who is required to use these devices to properly perform their job function, such as Public Information Office (PIO), Arson investigation, and Deputy Chiefs or at the request of the PIO, Incident Commander or Officer in Charge for MFD Social Media use.
- B. No members have the authorization to speak on behalf of the MFD unless permission has specifically been granted by the PIO or the Fire Chief. Social/Digital media posts considered inappropriate may be required to be removed by the authority of the Fire Chief.
- C. MFD Stations and personnel are strictly prohibited from creating or using a social media page on any platform that references the Mission Fire Department or MFD that includes photos of MFD property such as the Station, Apparatus, Clothing, Gear, or Tools in the photo. The use of helmet cams by MFD personnel is strictly prohibited without the prior written consent of the Fire Chief or the PIO. Photos that include any MFD owned property are strictly prohibited from publication on any social media platform other than the official MFD pages without express written permission of the Chief of MFD or the PIO. MFD personnel is prohibited from using an official department photo as their profile picture on their personal social media pages.
- D. No firefighter or civilian riding along on any MFD apparatus will be permitted to record any activities using a camera, or electronic device, involving MFD



Mission Fire Department Operations Manual
Section: Administrative Policies

Number: 100.11.00
Date: November 23, 2020
Revised:

apparatus, or personnel, without first receiving prior written approval from the PIO. Any such images or recordings, being made after receiving prior written approval will be considered the property of the MFD.

- E. All MFD personnel is required to adhere to this Policy and all other policies that apply when utilizing any social media platform. MFD recognizes the importance of social media for its personnel and acknowledges that its personnel has the right, under the First Amendment, to engage in discourse about matters of public concern.
- F. As public employees, MFD personnel are reminded that all speech is subject to reasonable restrictions. Whether on-duty or off-duty, speech related to official duties and responsibilities is not always protected under the First Amendment. Therefore, some speech posted on social media may lead to disciplinary action against the employee as determined by the Fire Chief.
- G. MFD has the right to monitor and review all postings made by its employees on social/digital media platforms for compliance with City and Department Policy.

III. Procedure

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA/DIGITAL MEDIA BY MFD PERSONNEL

- A. The following rules are provided to clearly define successful use of public media tools for all MFD personnel, sworn or non-sworn, whether on-duty or off-duty:
 - i. Anyone who identifies themselves as an MFD employee, in any capacity, on any social/digital media platform will be subject to all MFD and City of Mission rules and policies.
 - ii. Any MFD employee, whether on duty or off duty, who posts the Mission Fire Department insignia or likeness on any social/digital media platform, will be subject to all MFD and City of Mission rules and policies.



Mission Fire Department Operations Manual
Section: Administrative Policies

Number: 100.11.00
Date: November 23, 2020
Revised:

- iii. MFD personnel may not disclose confidential information regarding the department, its members, or release confidential information including information protected under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).
- iv. MFD personnel should not engage in speech that is false, deceptive, slanderous, lewd, and lascivious, misleading, or cause harm to others, including speech that constitutes harassment. In doing so, the employee may undermine the department and may result in corrective or disciplinary action, up to termination.
- v. MFD personnel are free to express themselves as private citizens as long as their speech does not impede the mission of the department, impact the performance and duties of the member or co-workers, or compromise the public's perception of the Department.
- vi. When engaging on personal social media, all MFD personnel will maintain a level of professionalism both on duty and off duty that is consistent with the Department's Standard Operating Procedures and mission.
- vii. MFD personnel are responsible for all content they publish on personal social/digital media and/or their affiliation through engagement such as comments, liking, sharing, retweeting, reposting, and the like.
- viii. All digital images that are taken while on-duty, with or without the approval of a supervisor or the PIO are property of the MFD and are subject to public record under Texas Laws. This includes but is not limited to: videos and photos from incidents, drills, activities within the station, Department-sponsored activities, training, etc.
- ix. All video and digital images that are taken off-duty of MFD Personnel wearing/displaying MFD insignia or official uniform are expected to abide by the MFD's Standard Operating Procedures. This includes but is not limited to: activities within the station, off duty details, and department-sponsored activities.
- x. Employees must not expect privacy while using the Department-owned or leased equipment, even when using this equipment to access their personal



Mission Fire Department Operations Manual
Section: Administrative Policies

Number: 100.11.00
Date: November 23, 2020
Revised:

email account or any social media site. Authorized use of Department or City of Mission equipment and networks is regulated by the Fire Chief and/or the Information Technology Division.

DIGITAL IMAGES TAKEN DURING INCIDENTS

- A. If at the request of the PIO, Incident Commander, or Officer in Charge, video or photographs are taken on-scene for department social media use, they must be surrendered to the Fire Chief or PIO after the incident or sooner if appropriate. If at the request of the PIO, Incident Commander, or Officer in Charge, video, or photographs taken on-scene for interdepartmental training or use, they must have approval by the Fire Chief or PIO before use. Under no circumstances should the capturing of photographs or videos interfere with the primary mission of assigned duties.
- B. MFD personnel, on-duty or off-duty, that take video or digital images during an incident, may not post or disseminate via any social media or any digital media not authorized by the MFD, Fire Chief, or PIO. Digital images obtained during incidents may be part of an investigation/evidence and subject to public records.
- C. Employees may not post, transmit, or disseminate any photographs, video, or other recordings obtained or accessible as a result of their employment with the department without the express authorization of the Fire Chief or their designee.
- D. Digital images should be sent only to the PIO or Fire Chief, for vetting and dissemination. The PIO reserves the right to utilize the images as they see fit for media use, education, training, community engagement, and public relations.
- E. To maintain consistency in messaging and style, approved digital images may be posted to official MFD social media accounts. MFD personnel is encouraged to then re-post or share the posts from official MFD accounts to their social media. No digital images taken on duty or during an incident, are to be posted on any other social media platforms other than official MFD accounts.



DIGITAL IMAGES TAKEN DURING DEPARTMENT-SPONSORED ACTIVITIES

- A. All digital images that are taken, on-duty or off-duty during department-sponsored activities are subject to review of this Policy and the Department's Standard Operating Procedures when deemed necessary by the Fire Chief or PIO.
- B. Digital images taken during Department-sponsored activities may be posted on MFD Personnel's personal social media/digital media accounts as long as they abide by this Policy and applicable Department's SOPs including Conduct Unbecoming and Uniform Standards for Sworn Personnel.

VIDEO OR DIGITAL IMAGES TAKEN WHILE ON-DUTY (NON-INCIDENT & NONDEPARTMENT- SPONSORED ACTIVITIES)

- A. All digital images taken while on-duty are subject to the department's Rules and Regulations and the department's Uniform Standards for Sworn Personnel.
- B. Any digital images taken while on-duty and posted on social /digital media that are inappropriate and violate this Policy and/or any department policy or Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are subject to disciplinary action, up to termination.

EXISTING UNAUTHORIZED SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

- A. Personnel, Stations, Bureaus, Divisions, and any other component of MFD that manage an unauthorized social media site of any type violate this policy.
- B. Account handles that are found to have MFD, its brand, or any likeness of the department including and no identifiable employee name, the site host will be requested to will be subject to a site host investigation. Upon completion of the site host investigation, if the author is found to be an MFD employee, that employee will be required to comply with this Policy and remove the unauthorized account. Upon completion of the site host investigation, if no author can be identified; MFD will begin the process of having the account in question terminated based on brand impersonation.



Mission Fire Department Operations Manual
Section: Administrative Policies

Number: 100.11.00
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VIDEO or DIGITAL IMAGE SUBMISSION

- A. MFD Personnel may submit video or digital images to the PIO for review and dissemination.