

	TYPE OF DIRECTIVE GENERAL ORDER	NUMBER G-10-23
	SUBJECT SOCIAL MEDIA / NETWORKING	EFFECTIVE DATE 09/08/23
	REFERENCE COUNTY POLICY, 200 POLICY, 300 CODE OF CONDUCT, RP-25, P-04, PA-01, PA-02	RESCINDS G-10-17

PURPOSE

This policy, in conjunction with [County policy regarding social media](#), establishes guidelines for Division-sponsored social media, as well as Division members' personal use of social media.

Because personal use of social media can affect the Division and its members in their official capacity, this policy provides information of a precautionary nature, as well as prohibitions on the use of social media by Division members (which, for the purposes of this directive, includes volunteers).

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this directive, the following terms are defined:

1. Post – Content an individual shares on a social media site or the act of publishing, commenting, creating, or uploading content (including audio, text, photographs, or videos) on a site.
2. 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 (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat), microblogging sites (e.g., Twitter, Nixle), photo and video sharing sites (e.g., Vimeo, YouTube), wikis (e.g., Wikipedia), blogs, and news sites (e.g., Reddit).
3. Social Networking – Using the Internet and social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, blogs, message boards, etc.) to communicate with others using the same media network.

PROCEDURES

I. DIVISION-SPONSORED SOCIAL MEDIA

- A. All Division-sponsored social media sites or pages shall be approved by the Chief of Police (or designee) and administered by the Office of Public Affairs.

The Office of Public Affairs shall:

1. Develop the means to provide real-time, accurate, medium-appropriate updates using existing social media outlets;
 2. Be responsible for the maintenance and monitoring of public social media postings and content;
- B. Limited internal access to social media has been granted for those in a sensitive position and who may use them in the performance of their assigned duties. Unless otherwise

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designated by the Chief of Police, access will be granted to members of the Office of Public Affairs. The Commander, Public Affairs shall serve as the Division's Social Media Coordinator.

- C. Social Media may be used by the Division for the following public safety and administrative purposes, including but not limited to:
1. Social media are valuable investigative tools when seeking evidence or information concerning, among other things, missing/wanted persons, gang participation, crimes perpetrated online (e.g., cyberstalking), and photos/videos of a crime posted by a participant or observer.
 2. Social media can be used for community outreach and engagement by providing crime prevention tips, offering online reporting opportunities, sharing crime maps and data, and soliciting tips about unsolved crimes (e.g., Crimestoppers).
 3. Social media can be used to make time-sensitive notifications related to road closures, special events, weather emergencies, fugitives at large, and missing/endangered persons.
 4. Social media can be used for recruiting personnel and volunteers.
 5. Social media can be used as an investigative tool for background investigations (refer to Personnel SOP P-04).
 6. Social media can be used to promote the Division and any Division-sponsored event.
 - a. All current members of the Police Division, to include sworn, non-sworn, interns, and volunteers, agree to allow Henrico Police to use their image in the media, with the exception of those assigned to an undercover position.

Officers assigned to an undercover assignment shall submit a Denial of Permission (HCPD-045) immediately upon their assignment to an undercover position.
 - b. If a member wishes not to have their image used, they must complete a Denial of Permission (HCPD-045) and submit it to the Public Information Office.

II. PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- A. Division members are advised that content posted on social media pursuant to their official duties may not be protected by the First Amendment and may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.
- B. Division members are free to express themselves as private citizens on social media sites to the degree that the content does not impair working relationships of this Division, impede the performance of duties, or undermine the Division's ability to fulfill its mission and

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public service. Division members may not utilize social media in a manner which could lead the reader to believe such postings represent the official positions of the Division or the County of Henrico.

- C. Engaging in speech prohibited by this directive may provide grounds for undermining or impeaching a member's testimony in court proceedings.
- D. Members shall not post the County seal or the Division's badge on their personal social media site(s) except in the following circumstances:
 - 1. It is not a violation when the County seal or Division badge is visible on a uniform displayed in a picture/photograph.
 - 2. Generic badges that are shrouded in honor of a law enforcement officer's death and/or during Police Memorial week are also permissible and are not in violation.
- E. Division members should be aware privacy settings on social media sites are in constant flux. Members should never assume personal information posted on such sites is protected.
- F. This policy supplements the directives for members' conduct contained in all other Division policies and provides guidance for members in applying those standards to the content of their online postings. The following rules apply when publishing content online:
 - 1. Members shall not post confidential, sensitive, or copyrighted information to which they have access because of their position with the Division. This includes, but is not limited to, content concerning the following:
 - a. Criminal or administrative investigations;
 - b. Photographs of suspects or arrestees; and/or
 - c. On-duty response to resistance incidents, internal affairs investigations, or pending prosecutions.
 - 2. Members shall not post, promote, or "share" content containing obscene or sexually explicit language, images, acts, statements, or other forms of speech that ridicule, malign, disparage, or otherwise express bias against any race, color, religion, national origin, pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions (including lactation), age, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or military status, status as an organ donor, or any protected class of individuals.
 - 3. Members shall not post content that condones or promotes illegal activity or violates the rights or threatens the safety of any person or entity.
 - 4. Content posted has the potential to be shared broadly, including to people with whom members did not intend to communicate. Members should be mindful that all content may be printed and re-distributed outside of the original recipient group.

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5. Members shall not engage in personal social networking activities while on-duty.
6. Any information posted in a public online forum may be accessed by the Division without any prior notice.
7. Supervisors must be sure that online content, including content they post about themselves and any comments they make about their subordinates, is consistent with their role as a supervisor.
8. Members shall not post information or images that identify others as Police Division members without their permission.
9. Members who choose to post information or images that identify themselves as Police Division members should consider the effect that such postings may have on their personal safety and reputation.
10. Members who are, or who may reasonably be, expected to work in undercover operations should not post any form of visual or personal identification.

III. DISCIPLINARY ACTION

- A. A supervisor shall be notified immediately if a Division member becomes aware of a posting or any website or web page of another Division member and/or the Division-sponsored social media sites that is in violation of this directive. If this Division member fails to notify a supervisor immediately, they may be subject to disciplinary action. If the notified supervisor determines that there has been a violation of this directive, the supervisor shall follow the procedures outlined in RP-25 Corrective/Disciplinary Action.
- B. The Division may require a member to remove content that violates this directive. Failure to do so in a reasonable time may subject the member to disciplinary action.

By Order of:

Eric D. English
Chief of Police