

Hamden Police Department General Orders

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Section: General Management

Rescinds: No Previous Version

Title: Social Media

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PURPOSE

To establish the Hamden Police Department's position on the utility and management of social media and provide guidance on its management, administration, and oversight by Department personnel both on-duty in the course of their official duties and off-duty when identified as members of the organization, or otherwise pursuant to their official duties in the public arena.

Social media provides a new and potentially valuable means of assisting the Department and its personnel in meeting community outreach, problem-solving, investigative, crime prevention, and related objectives. As such, the Hamden Police Department endorses the secure use of social media to enhance communication, collaboration, and information exchange; streamline processes; and foster productivity. This policy is not meant to address one particular form of social media; rather social media in general, as advances in technology will occur and new tools emerge.

The Department also recognizes the role that these tools play in the personal lives of some Department personnel. The personal use of social media can have bearing on Departmental personnel in their official capacity. Accordingly, this policy provides information of a precautionary nature as well as prohibitions on the use of social media by Department personnel.

POLICY

It is the Hamden Police Department policy that all personnel use computers, computer applications, computer programs, Internet resources, and network/Internet communications in a responsible, professional, ethical, and lawful manner. Department employees are prohibited from posting, transmitting, and/or disseminating any photographs, video or audio recordings, likenesses or images of department logos, emblems, uniforms, badges, patches, marked or unmarked vehicles, equipment, or other material that specifically identifies the Department, on any personal or social networking website or web page, without express written permission of the Chief of Police unless necessary for an expeditious investigative purpose in the course of duty so approved by a supervisor.

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All existing laws, regulations, and policies that govern on- and off-duty conduct are applicable to conduct associated with social media and networking accordingly. When engaging in social networking, all police department and town employees working within the police department will adhere to any and all existing federal, state and local laws, policies of the Hamden Police Department and laws regarding public information on arrests, investigations, and personnel data.

DEFINITIONS

Blog: A self-authored diary or commentary on a particular topic that may allow visitors to post responses, reactions, or comments.

Blogosphere: Denotes the world of blogs and refers to all the blogs and blog interactions on the internet.

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

Forums: Discussion areas on websites where people can post messages or comments on existing messages at any time.

Page: The specific portion of a social media website where content is displayed.

Post (noun): Content an individual shares on a social media or similar website.

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

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, blogs and microblogging sites, photo and video sharing sites, wikis, and news sites that permit user contributed content.

Social Networks: Online platforms where users can create profiles, share information, and socialize with others using a range of technologies such as messaging websites, on-line bulletins boards, blogs, wikis, news sites, and/or other similarly developed formats that may allow electronic communication and/or contacting services.

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

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PROCEDURES

Where the Hamden Police Department uses social media to advance the purposes and goals of the organization, the following procedures shall apply to employees both sworn and civilian regarding the use of social media while engaged in an official Department-sanctioned capacity:

A. General Operating Procedures for Department-Sanctioned Use of Social Media

1. Where possible, each social media page shall include an introductory statement that clearly specifies the purpose and scope of the agency's presence on the website.
2. When appropriate, the page(s) should link to the Department's official website.
3. Social media page(s) should be designed for the target audience(s) for example youth or potential police recruits.
4. All Department sanctioned social media sites or pages shall be approved by the Chief of Police or his designee and shall be administered by the Department's Information Technology section.
5. Where applicable, social media pages shall clearly indicate they are maintained by the Department and shall have Department contact information prominently displayed.
6. Social media content shall adhere to applicable laws, regulations, and Departmental policies.
7. Content may be subject to public records laws. Relevant records retention schedules shall apply to social media content.
8. Content must be managed, stored, and retrieved to comply with public records laws.
9. Where applicable, social media pages should state that the opinions expressed by visitors to the page(s) do not reflect the opinions of the Department.

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10. Pages shall clearly indicate that posted comments will be monitored and that the Department reserves the right to remove obscenities, off-topic comments, and personal attacks.
11. Pages shall clearly indicate that any content posted or submitted for posting may be subject to public disclosure.
12. Should the Internet and/or any website be utilized for online investigative purposes that necessitate the utilization of Department officers in an undercover or covert capacity by the Computer Crime Unit, policy as herein stated may be altered to accommodate the necessity of the investigation.

B. Conduct During Official Department-Sanctioned Use of Social Media

When representing the Department via social media outlets:

1. Employees shall 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.
2. Employees shall identify themselves as a member of the Department unless law-enforcement purposes dictate otherwise.
3. Employees shall not make statements about the guilt or innocence of any suspect or arrestee, or comments concerning pending prosecutions, nor post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate confidential information, including photographs or videos, related to Department training, activities, or work-related assignments without express written permission.
4. Employees shall not conduct political activities or private business.
5. Department personnel use of personally owned devices to manage the Department's social media activities or in the course of official duties is prohibited without express written permission from the Chief of Police or his designee.
6. Employees shall observe and abide by all copyright, trademark, and service mark restrictions in posting materials to electronic media.

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C. Examples of Recognized Uses for an Official Department-Sanctioned Social Media Presence

1. Social media is a valuable investigative tool when seeking evidence or information about:
 - Missing persons
 - Wanted persons
 - Gang participation
 - Crimes perpetrated online (i.e., cyberbullying, cyberstalking)
 - Photos or videos of a crime posted by a participant or observer.
 - Any crime being investigated where social media may hold content of evidentiary value

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
 - Soliciting tips about unsolved crimes.

3. Social media can be used to make time-sensitive notifications related to:
 - Road closures
 - Special events
 - Weather emergencies
 - Missing or endangered persons.

D. Use During Employment Screening

1. Persons seeking employment and volunteer positions use the Internet to search for opportunities, and social media can be a valuable recruitment mechanism. This Department should include Internet-based content when conducting background investigations of job candidates.

2. Searches should be conducted by a non-decision maker.

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3. Persons authorized to search Internet-based content should be deemed as holding a sensitive position.
4. Search methods shall not involve techniques that are a violation of existing law.
5. Vetting techniques shall be applied uniformly to all candidates.
6. Every effort must be made to validate Internet-based information considered during the hiring process.

E. Personal Use of Social Media – Precautions and Prohibitions

Barring state law or binding employment contracts to the contrary, Department personnel shall abide by the following when using social media:

1. Department personnel are free to express themselves as private citizens on social media sites to the degree that their speech does not violate law. Caution should be used regarding speech that may impair working relationships of this Department 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 Department.
2. 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.
3. All Department personnel, sworn and civilian, shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any information, to which they have official access, generated as a result of their employment without written permission from the Chief of Police or his designee.
4. For safety and security reasons, all Department personnel sworn and civilian are cautioned not to disclose their employment with this Department nor shall they post information identifying any other member of the Department without their permission. As such, Department personnel are prohibited from the following:
 - Display Department logos, uniforms, or similar identifying items on personal web pages.

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- Post personal photographs or provide similar means of personal recognition that may cause them to be identified as an employee of this Department. Officers who are, or who may reasonably be expected to work in undercover operations, shall not post any form of visual or personal information identifying themselves as police officers or representatives of this department.
5. When using social media, sworn and civilian Department personnel should be mindful that their speech becomes part of the worldwide electronic domain. Therefore, adherence to the Department's Code of Conduct is recommended in the personal use of social media. Engaging in prohibited speech noted herein, may provide grounds for undermining or impeaching an officer's testimony in criminal proceedings.
 6. Department personnel 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 this Department without express authorization.
 7. Department personnel 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 (defamation).
 - 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.
 - Publishing the creative work of another, trademarks, or certain confidential business information without the permission of the owner.
 8. 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.

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9. Department personnel should understand that any information created, transmitted, downloaded, exchanged, or discussed in a public online forum may be accessed by anyone at any time, including the Department.
10. Reporting violations – Any employee becoming aware of or having knowledge of a posting or of any website or web page in violation of Department sanctioned use shall notify his or her supervisor immediately for follow-up action.
11. Except in the performance of an authorized duty, employees may not use Department computers to access social networking sites, blogs, bulletin boards, or similar media.
12. The use of social media has to some extent become mainstream, comparable to utilizing text messaging or talking on a telephone. Social Media can provide emergency and/or pertinent law enforcement related information rapidly, sometimes faster than other venues. The Department recognizes this and recommends all employees sworn and civilian use personal computers, cell phones, or other devices to access social networking sites, blogs, bulletin boards, or similar media to a minimal degree while on duty such that it does not affect performance or their attentiveness to duty.
13. Except in the performance of an authorized duty, employees shall not post, transmit, reproduce, and/or disseminate information (texts, pictures, video, audio, etc) to the internet or any other forum (public or private) that would tend to discredit or reflect unfavorably upon the Department or any of the Department's employees.
14. Employees having personal web pages or other types of internet postings which can be accessed by the public, shall not place, or allow to be placed, photographs or depictions of themselves dressed in uniform and/or displaying official identification, patches or badges, or in any way, either directly or indirectly, identify themselves as an employee of the department for any reason, without approval as indicated in this policy.
15. Employees having personal web pages shall not use their rank, title, or position in a manner that would suggest that they are representing the interests or official position of the police department.

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16. Photographs of the inside of the police building as well as any crime or accident scene shall not be posted without consent of the Chief of Police.
17. When engaging in the personal use of social media, employees shall not post any text, photograph, audio, video, illustration, or any other multimedia file related to or depicting any of the following:
 - Current, past, or pending departmental investigation.
 - Criminal or civil proceeding pertaining to, or arising from, any matter involving the department, including allegations of misconduct.
 - Brandishing town-owned weaponry or any contraband whether actual or simulated.
 - Brandishing any town owned tactical instrument, including, but not limited to: firearms, ASP, baton, OC spray, electrical control weapon, and/or mechanical restraints.
18. Posting the following types of criminal justice information to social networking sites is explicitly prohibited:
 - Confidential, sensitive, or copyrighted information to which you have access due to your employment with the Town;
 - Data from an ongoing criminal or administrative investigation including photographs, videos, or audio recordings;
 - Photographs of suspects, arrestees or evidence created and/or obtained in the performance of your official duty;
 - Personal statements about an on-duty use of force incident;
 - Comments related to pending prosecutions.

F. Approval Process

1. An employee seeking approval to use references to the Hamden Police Department on a personal website, web page, or other public forum shall submit a request for approval to the Chief of Police.