

## Fairfield County Fire Service

### Social Media Policy

The Fairfield County Fire Service acknowledges that use of technology by emergency service organizations provides several useful benefits including training and the acquisition of useful information for the betterment of the organization and its members. It also allows for the dissemination of information to the public for recruitment, safety education and public relations purposes. As such, the Fairfield County Fire Service embraces the usage of instant technology to that end.

The policy establishes Fairfield County Fire Service social media and instant technology use procedures and protocols that are intended to mitigate associated risks from the use of this service.

This policy applies to all volunteers/employees of the Fairfield County Fire Service, consultants and contractors performing business on behalf of the Fairfield County Fire Service.

For the purposes of this policy, the term instant technology is defined as resources including, but not limited to, instant messaging, texting, paging and social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and any other information sharing services, websites and/or blogs.

The Fire Directors Office or their designees shall approve all Department/District social media pages. All social media content shall adhere to all applicable laws, regulations and policies including the records management and retention requirements set by law and regulation.

The internet and other information sharing devices are global entities with no control of users or content. Therefore, available resources may contain material of a controversial nature. The Fairfield County Fire Service is not responsible for information found on these sources.

The Fairfield County Fire Service understand the value of such technology, but also understand the concerns and issues raised when information is released that violates privacy concerns or portrays this organization to the public in an illegal or negative manner (intentional or unintentional) Therefore, no information, videos or pictures gathered while on Fairfield County Fire Service business (this includes emergency calls, meetings, drills, details, trainings or anything obtained on organization property or at organization functions) may be shared or posted in any format without the approval and written consent of the Director of Fire Service.

Under this restriction, members and employees are prohibited from disseminating or transmitting in any fashion photographs or images of individuals receiving emergency medical assistance. Any such transmission may violate South Carolina State Laws and/or the HIPPA privacy rights of such individuals and may result in criminal and/or civil proceeding being commenced against members and employees violating the provision of the policy.

This policy is not intended to limit your right to freedom of speech or expression; but as we are a public entity, it has been put in place to protect the rights of this organization, its member and the public we are sworn to protect. Members and employees are advised that their speech directly or by any means of instant technology either on or off duty and in the course of their official duties that has a connection to their professional duties and responsibilities may not be protected under the First Amendment. Speech that impairs or impedes the performance of the Fairfield County Fire Service, undermines discipline and harmony among co-workers or negatively affects the public perception of the Fairfield County Fire Service may be sanctioned. Further, dissemination of sensitive or personal information through Fire Service technology may be subject to discovery through legal means and may expose the Fire Service, and the individual forwarding such personal or sensitive information, to lawsuits and legal liability.

As a basic concept of constitutional concept of law, a public employee may comment on a matter of public concern. However, airing personal workplace grievances does not raise a matter of public concern.

In that regard, members and employees must follow the following guidelines when discussing the Fairfield County Fire Service on social media websites:

- Do not make and disparaging or false statements or use profane language.
- Do not make any statements or other forms of speech that ridicule, malign, disparage or otherwise express bias against any race, religion or protected class of individual.
- Make clear that you are expressing your personal opinion and not that of the Fire District/Fire Department.
- Do not share confidential or proprietary information.
- Do not violate Fairfield County Fire Service policies including the Code of Ethics.
- Do not release information to the public that has not been authorized by the PIO or Chief Officer.
- Do not publish any materials that could reasonably be considered to represent the views or positions of the Department or District without authorization.

The Fairfield County Fire Service owns the right to all data and files in any owned computer, network, cell phone or other information system. The Fairfield County Fire Service also reserves the right to monitor electronic mail messages (including personal/private/instant messaging systems) and their content, as well as any and all use of the internet and of computer equipment used to create, view or access email and internet content which belongs to the Fairfield County Fire Service. Members and employees must be aware that the electronic messages sent and received on Fairfield County Fire Service equipment, software or web pages (owned or leased) are not private and are subject to viewing, downloading, inspection, release, and archiving by the Fairfield County Fire Service at all times. The Fairfield County Fire Service has the right to inspect any and all files stored in private areas of the network or on individual computers or storage media associated with the Fairfield County Fire Service in order to assure compliance with policy and state and federal laws.

Inappropriate use of the internet and instant technology regarding Fairfield County Fire Service business may result in disciplinary actions, up to and including termination as a member/employee/contractor of the Fairfield County Fire Service.

Violations of this policy will result in one of the following:

- Three (3) month suspension
- Six (6) month suspension followed by six (6) month probation
- Termination