



**CHAMBERS COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES NO. 1
SOCIAL MEDIAL POLICY
Adopted on September 11, 2019**

1. Introduction.

Given the multitude of concerns (legal, political, and ethical) raised by social networking establishes prudent and acceptable practices to be followed by the Chambers County Emergency Services District No. 1's ("District") Board of Commissioners and employees and/or independent contractors, including but not limited to, the volunteers of the Winnie Stowell Volunteer Fire Department, and the commissioned firefighters paid by the District (for purposes of this policy only, referred to collectively as "Employees") use of the internet and/or Social Media platforms.

2. Purpose.

The District encourages the use of Social Media to advance the goals of the District, where appropriate. The purpose of this guideline/policy is to assist the Directors and Employees of the District on how to effectively and responsibly navigate issues unique to Social Media. This includes the management and development of Social Media tools, content, restrictions and limitations.

The definition of Social Media is web-based applications that facilitates information sharing and collaboration such as web-based communities, social networking sites, video-sharing sites, wikis, blogs and others.

The District's Administrator, or an appointee, is responsible for developing, maintaining, and monitoring Social Media applications shall be designated by the District Administrator. The District Administrator shall be the final authority on content published to Social Media applications.

Through this policy, the District anticipates mitigating certain activities on the part of its Directors and Employees that may become a problem if such activities could:

- Impair the work of the District, a Director, or the District's Employees by creating a harassing, demeaning, or hostile work environment; or

- Disrupt the smooth and orderly flow of work; or harm the goodwill and reputation of the District among its citizens or in the community.

3. Applicability

These guidelines and policies are applicable to all District Directors and Employees who utilize any Social Media directly or indirectly on behalf of the District. This policy also applies to all District Directors and Employees who personally utilize any Social Media or other internet activity that may impact the District's credibility, reputation, Employee morale, services or goals of the District. These guidelines apply without regard to whether the use of Social Media occurs:

- During time when the Employee is on duty or Off-Duty; and
- Regardless of whether the Employee is on the District's premise or using any of the District' equipment.

4. Employees' Reasonable Expectation of Privacy and Factors to Consider Prior to Objecting to Social Media Content

a. Reasonable Expectation of Privacy versus District's Interest

The District recognizes that there is an inherent conflict regarding Social Media and appreciates that District Employees have a reasonable expectation of privacy or confidentiality when the content (written text, pictures, or videos) is being disseminated through Social Media. Any person posting a video on YouTube, for example, is essentially the owner of his or her own international Internet distribution center or "television" station. An Employee's Social Media content could be distributed for "the world to see" even when it is not the intention. An email, Facebook post, photograph, blog, or video, could be passed along to an endless number of recipients.

Despite an Employee's attempt to limit who has access to their Social Media sites or communications, Employees shall recognize that these communications frequently land in the hands of unintended recipients. Inappropriate, offensive, or personal communications often are called to the attention of the District's Administrator and/or Commissioners who are left to determine what actions, if any, could or should be taken against the Employees who authored the written content, or posted the pictures or videos.

b. Factors to Consider when Assessing the District's Interest in Objecting to Employees' Social Media Usage

(1) On Employer Time or within Organization Premises: The District has a stake in what behavior or activities its Employees are engaged in while "on the clock," on the District's premises or otherwise engaged in business-related activities. Employees should be cognizant of their inappropriate usage of business-owned telephones, computers, or other devices to communicate offensive, intimidating, discriminatory, harassing, or other unprofessional Social Media content. Employees may be

disciplined even when using their own personal laptop computer or Smartphone while on duty, organization property or otherwise engaged in business-related activities.

- (2) **"Off-duty"**: - Employees may post pictures, videos, or written text on their personal Social Media site while off-duty. However, it is crucial Employees understand that postings made on their own time, from their own computer or Smartphone, and while off District property can still harm the organization, its personnel and the community served. Under a variety of circumstances, these off-duty communications can be tied directly to business-related activities, personal or professional reputation within the community or co-worker relationships and can be deemed to violate this Policy.
- (3) **Business-related information**: Employees may use their personal Social Media networks to discuss business-related information and could violate confidentiality laws and/or business policies. Subject to the guidelines set forth in this Social Media Policy, Employees shall not communicate sensitive or confidential information about the District's financial, operational and personnel functions.
- (4) **Co-workers as subjects of postings**: Problems result when an Employee posts information, allegations, pictures, or videos about co-workers that could be considered harmful to that individual. For instance, an Employee can post disparaging allegations that are harassing, discriminatory, or retaliatory in nature against co-workers. Post that injure co-workers, irrelevant of whether the offending party posts such information while on or off-duty, violate this Policy.

5. Acceptable Uses and Restrictions

a. Best Usage of Social Media

The best and most appropriate uses of Social Media for the District generally fall into two categories:

- As a channel for disseminating time-sensitive information as quickly as possible.
- As a mechanism for communication between the District and members of the public, and more directly, the residents and businesses within the District.

b. Duty to Honor District Policies and Standards

District Employees representing the District on District Social Media sites and applications in the course of their assigned duties and responsibilities are bound by existing District policies and standards, including but not limited to:

- Applicable state, federal and local laws, regulations, ordinances, charter provisions and District policies (E.g. Title VII, nondiscrimination, harassment, etc.);
- All information and technology security guidelines, procedures and policies;
- Existing District standards of conduct, ethics, rules and policies;
- The Texas Public Information Act and e-discovery laws and policies (requiring content to be managed, stored and retrieved and open to public inspection and disclosure); and

- Applicable state records-retention laws and District schedules for retention.

c. Social Media Usage Prohibitions and Guidelines

All District Employees must be cognizant of how they present themselves on Social Media applications reflects whether through the use of District Social Media sites or personal ones. Public and private or personal and professional avenues of communication may easily become blurred and result in inappropriate use or content.

Whether on duty, Off-Duty, on premises, or off premises, Employees understand and agree to the following restrictions while using Social Media:

(1) Confidentiality

Employees will not post or use proprietary, confidential, sensitive or individually identifiable information or divulge District in any Social Media applications.

(2) Disclaimers

If Employees refer to or identify themselves as District Employees on Social Media applications, use of a disclaimer is mandatory. (e.g. "While I work for the District, anything I publish is my personal opinion and not the opinion or position of the District, or a reflection of the District's policies).

(3) Personal vs. Professional Use

Employees' personal Social Media sites should remain personal in nature and should not be comingled or used for work-related purposes or to conduct official District business. Employees should not use their District e-mail account or password when accessing personal Social Media accounts. Personal and District Social Media accounts should not be synchronized for dual access or reference purposes.

(4) Use of District Resources

Employees may use District-owned assets and equipment or resources (computers and cell phones) to access Social Media sites (personal or District sites) on a limited basis. District Administrator will determine the level of access assigned to authorized users and the limits of non-business use for the user.

(5) Harassment or Intimidation: Harassment, discrimination, retaliation or other behavior that may be considered inappropriate, offensive, or intimidating to a member of the public or Employee is strictly prohibited.

6. District Owned or Maintained Social Media Applications

All District-related communication through Social Media applications owned, maintained, controlled, or operated by the District should remain professional in nature and should be conducted in accordance with the District's communications policy, practices and expectations. Employees are expected to use good judgment and take personal and professional responsibility for any content they publish via Social Media.

a. Authorized Employees

Authorized Employees are the District Manager, Commissioners, or an Employee designated by the District Manager pursuant to terms set forth by the District Manager.

b. District Owned or Maintained Social Media Guidelines

(1) Authorization

Not access Social Media sites or other online forums on behalf of the District unless authorized by appropriate District management.

(2) Identify Yourself Clearly

When creating or using Social Media accounts that require individual identification, authorized users speaking on behalf of the District should identify themselves, if possible, by:

- full name;
- title;
- department; and
- contact information, when posing or exchanging information on Social Media forums.

Unauthorized use of an Authorized Employee's identification or access credentials/information is a violation of this policy and will be disciplined accordingly.

(3) No Privacy Expectation

Employees should have no expectation of privacy as to information stored on District computers, networks, databases or devices. Furthermore, there should be no expectation of privacy regarding any communications between any District Employee and the public when the Employee is in course and scope of performing his/her assigned duties

(4) Authorized Use

Only authorized District Employees may moderate District developed Social Media applications and sites on behalf of the District. Authorized Employees must support the District's missions and goals in doing so.

c. Communication Quality

Authorized Employees should use good judgment and accuracy in all District Social Media communications. Errors and omissions reflect poorly on the District and may result in liability for the District. In addition to the Professional Responsibilities listed above, Employees should refrain from any Social Media activity that is inconsistent with, or that reasonably could be expected to negatively impact the District's reputation or standing in the community. Employees are cautioned to be respectful and professional to everyone, including fellow Employees, organizations, residents, and businesses.

When drafting a communication, make sure that it:

- Has a clear purpose;
- Speaks well to the reader;
- Is clear and concise without unnecessary verbiage;
- Provides value to the reader;
- Uses proper spelling, grammar, syntax and punctuation;
- Is positive and informative;
- Offers links, pictures or references opportunities for more information, where reasonable; and
- Has benefit to both the District and public.

In addition to the suggestions above, best practices on how to be a good citizen of the Social Media environment include:

(1) Be responsible

All statements made about the District in any Social Media site, whether personal, private or official, reflect upon the District, its Employees, services, Directors and other elected officials. Each Employee will be held accountable for all posts made officially in District media sites, or personally on District media sites, or in personal social sites. Once published, a communication can never be totally eliminated from the web, even if withdrawn. Defamatory or disparaging statements about the District, its Directors, Employees, or services made on personal or private Social Media sites are no less a reflection on the District and serve as a basis for lack of accountability against any Employee who violates these guidelines.

(2) Be honest and transparent

Dishonesty, deceit, and untruthfulness are quickly noted in the Social Media environment and have a deleterious effect on the District. Therefore, all representations made on District media sites must be clear, accurate, complete, thorough and truthful.

(3) Correct errors quickly

Any mistakes should be admitted as directly as feasible. Omissions, misleading entries or misrepresentations must be corrected as soon as they are recognized or brought to the District's attention. Correct information will be quickly provided with appropriate modifications and disclaimers, if necessary or helpful to clear up any misunderstanding or confusion.

(4) Be Respectful of the Reader and the Audience

Social Media publications should only be made when the District and/or the public would benefit by the publication. Value must be added. Communications from the District should assist the public and build a co-beneficial relationship and rapport with the District and its agents. This could include, among other things, thought provoking

articles that build a sense of community, improve knowledge or skills, enhance business development, enable problem solving, increase awareness of District sources and resources and encourage mutually beneficial platforms for Employees to provide better, more efficient District services.

(5) Stay within your Area of Expertise or Authority

All information posted on District sites must be authorized and appropriate. Employees should only publish information within their own area of expertise and not speculate, guess or assert opinion or commentary unless approval is authorized by appropriate District management.

(6) Respect Proprietary Information, Content, Privacy and Confidentiality

For any non-original work, proper credit must be attributed. No copyrights, trademarks, trade secrets or other proprietary matter may be published without prior written approval, licenses obtained, permits and fees paid and/or proper attribution made within the publication itself. Links may be referenced to others' work rather than reproducing it on the District site.

Employees' or Director's names and/or likenesses may be used only with permission from such person to post on the site. All publications that include District intellectual property or confidential information of any kind must be safeguarded with appropriate disclaimers and notices to prohibit the unauthorized use or performance of such proprietary matters.

(7) Respond Quickly

All communications requiring a reply or response shall be made in a timely manner in accordance with these guidelines.

(8) Be sociable, Courteous and Respectful

In all communications, Directors and Employees should use plain language and avoid using government acronyms. Use content that is open-ended and invites a response or encourages comments. Responses should always be polite and respectful, even if the original response is not. When shortening words to maximize communication, utilize commonly used shorthand terms, letters and symbols.

(9) Abide by Social Media Rules

Directors and Employees utilizing Social Media sites shall abide by the site's terms of service or terms of use. Before utilizing the site, each Employee shall become acquainted with each site's terms and conditions of use or rules for services and follow them as directed. No Employee is authorized to abuse a Social Media site and shall be accountable for any abuse, misuse or violations of such terms or rules of engagement.

(10) Prioritize your Participation

While on duty, Employees shall use Social Media sites only as approved and should not linger longer than necessary. Duration of use shall be commensurate with job

duties and responsibilities and only as long as necessary to complete District business.

d. Restrictions and Prohibitions for District's Social Media Sites

Users and visitors to the District Social Media sites will be notified that the intended purpose of the site is to serve as a mechanism for communication between the District and the public. Although free speech and cross-communication is encouraged, there are certain topics and issues that are NOT allowed on District Social Media sites comments, links and uploads. By way of example, these include, but are not limited to:

- Comments in support of or opposition to political campaigns or ballot measures.
- Profane language or content.
- Harassing, abusive or disparaging comments directed at individual(s).
- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status or lack thereof, socio-economic status of individual(s), national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation
- Sexual expression, discrimination, harassment or content of any kind or links to sexual content or pornography whether of an adult, minor or child.
- Any expression of conduct or encouragement of illegal activity
- Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or the District's public safety systems
- Any expression of words that would disparage right, title or interest of a legal ownership of any other individual or business.
- Comments that do not pertain to the topic under discussion; including comments containing links to other websites or pages which are not relevant to the topic under discussion
- Advertising or promotional announcements of private or commercial enterprises, even if not for profit unless the District is cosponsoring such activity or event. Only District business related advertising (services) or promotional announcements (special events) are allowed.
- Individually identifiable information (e.g. address, phone number, birthdates, and social security numbers) of specific individuals be they District Employees, officials or members of the public.

The District reserves the right to restrict or refuse to re-publish any content that is deemed in violation of these guidelines or any applicable federal, state or local law(s), including the terms of service or terms of use outlined by third-party Social Media application providers. The District reserves the right to block users who violate these terms.

7. Grievances

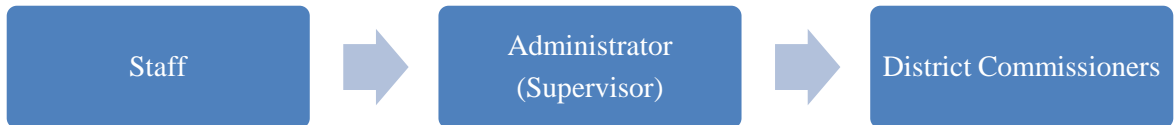
a. Policy

It is the policy of the District, insofar as possible, to prevent the occurrence of grievances

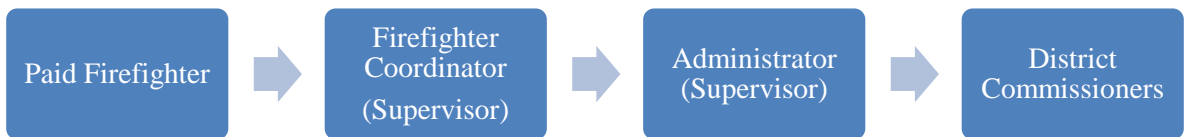
resulting from breaches of the Social Media policy and to deal promptly with those which occur. No adverse action will be taken against an Employee for reason of his or her exercise of the grievance right until the Employee has exercised his due process rights set forth in this policy.

b. Chain of Command

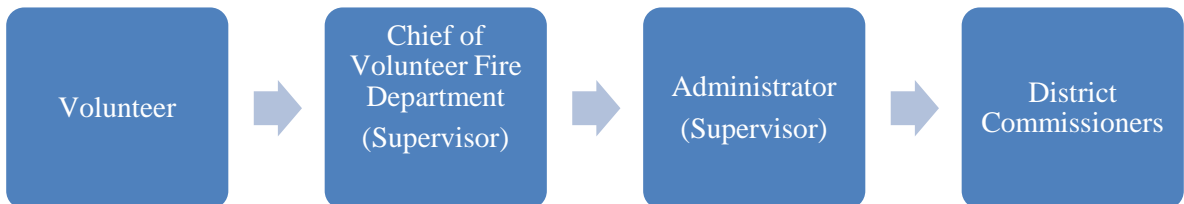
(1) District Staff



(2) Paid Firefighters



3. Volunteer Firefighters and Station Attendants



c. Informal Grievances

The first step in the grievance procedure is for the Employee to attempt to resolve the grievance by informal conference with his or her immediate Supervisor. If the immediate supervisor is the aggrieving Employee, then the Employee shall raise the issue with the next in command. If the informal conference does not result in a resolution of the problem(s) that is satisfactory to the employee, he or she must file a formal, written grievance.

d. Formal Grievances

(1) Formal grievances must be in writing, signed by the Employee, and presented to the Supervisor or next in command if the Supervisor is the aggrieving Employee, within 10 working days after the alleged grievance occurred. A statement of the specific remedial action requested by the employee must be included in the written grievance.

- (2) An Employee may be represented throughout the grievance process by another District Employee of his or her choosing.
- (3) After being presented with a written and signed grievance, the Supervisor shall:
- Meet with the employee and such other persons as may be necessary to gather the facts;
 - Notify the next Supervisor in the Chain of Command of the grievance;
 - Attempt to resolve the grievance with the Employee and, if requested by the employee, with the Employee's representative; and
 - Communicate the decision to the employee in writing within 10 working days after receipt of the grievance, sending a copy of the proposed resolution to the next Supervisor in the Chain of Command.
- (4) If an Employee is not satisfied with the proposed resolution, he or she must file a written appeal with the next Supervisor in the Chain of Command or District Commissioners if they are next in the Chain of Command, within ten (10) days who shall provide a written response within forty-eight (48) hours of receipt of the grievance and decision of initial Supervisor.
- (5) If the Employee is not satisfied with Supervisor(s) resolution of the grievance, District's Board will review the facts and investigate the charges and conduct alleged by the Employee will respond in writing to the Employee within 10 days after the meeting following receipt of the grievance. Thereafter, the District's Board's decision is final.

e. Documentation

All grievances must be submitted in writing by the aggrieved Employee to his or her supervisor along with copies of all documentation relating to the grievance. If the Supervisor is the subject of the grievance, then the aggrieved employee shall submit the grievance and supporting documents to the next Employee in the Chain of Command.

f. Authority of District Administrator

No provision in this policy shall limit in any way authority granted to the District Administrator in other policies and agreements that have been approved by the Commissioners of the District.

8. Disciplinary Action

Any violation of this policy is subject to discipline by the District Administrator and/or the District's Commissioners up to and including termination of employment.

9. Records Retention

The following shall apply regarding the retention of District business, information or public records

of posts to Social Media applications and tools:

- a. All content published and received by the District using Social Media in connection with the transaction of the District's public business are public records in accordance with the Texas Public Information Act.
- b. The District remains responsible for capturing electronic copies of its public records made or received using Social Media, including those records made or received using third-party websites. All District Employees and users are prohibited from deleting, altering, or in any way destroying, obliterating or tampering with the Social Media posts once they have been officially entered into the social medium.
- c. All District Employees are responsible for keeping their individual access information confidential and they will be held individually accountable for all entries made under their access data. It is no defense that the computer was accessible to others or that someone else might have tampered, deleted, or made an unauthorized post while the system was accessed by a third party, if the Employee left the access open and/or unattended.
- d. The District retains public records and disposes Social Media public records in accordance with Texas State Records Retention Schedule.

10. Questions, Comment and Concerns

If, at any time, there is an uncertainty about how to apply these guidelines or questions arise regarding participation in Social Media, all Employees are directed to seek the guidance of the District Administrator or Employee designated by the District Administrator responsible for all Social Media assets. Social Media is in a state of constant change and the District recognizes that there will likely be events or issues that are not addressed in these guidelines. Therefore, the responsibility falls to everyone to use good judgment, and when in doubt, to ask for clarification or authorization before engaging in questionable online conduct. Any Employee who observes questionable or inappropriate Social Media conduct or posts whether on District official sites or on personal or private sites that could be a violation of this policy or potentially negatively impact the District, are directed to report this information to the District Administrator, or Employee designated by the District Administrator responsible for all Social Media assets.

BUSINESS ASSOCIATE:

By: _____

Title: _____

Date: _____

COVERED ENTITY:

Chambers County Emergency Service District No. 1

By: _____

Title: Administrator

Date: _____