

PHOENIX FIRE DEPARTMENT
Volume 1 – Management Procedures

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

M.P. 105.18	Date Revised: 08/26
This policy is for internal use only and does not expand an employee’s legal duty or civil liability in any way. This policy should not be construed as creating a duty to act or a higher duty of care with respect to third-party civil claims against employees, the Phoenix Fire Department (PFD) or the City of Phoenix. A violation of this policy, if proven, can only form the basis for non-judicial administrative action by the employer in accordance with the laws and rules governing employee discipline.	
Related Policies: A.R. 1.32, A.R. 1.60, A.R. 1.63, A.R. 1.87, A.R. 1.90, A.R. 1.92, A.R. 1.95, A.R. 2.16, A.R. 2.35, A.R. 2.38, A.R. 2.99, Employee Manual.	

TRANSMITTAL MESSAGE

Questions regarding this Social Media policy may be directed to:

- **Policy Content & Compliance:** Human Resources Department, (602) 262-6608
- **Department Social Media Representation:** Public Affairs Section, (602) 534-0953
- **Lead PIO:** Community Risk Education, 602-370-5718
- **Union Member Questions & Rights:** IAFF Local 493 Union Representative (602) 277-1500; Unit 3: (602) 254-3966; Unit 7: (602) 793-7750

PURPOSE

It is the Phoenix Fire Department's policy to establish clear guidelines for employee conduct on social media platforms while protecting employee civil liberties, labor rights, and First Amendment protections. This policy addresses current digital platforms (TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Threads, YouTube Shorts) and emerging risks (AI-generated content, deepfakes) in a manner consistent with City employment law and federal labor protections.

The Phoenix Fire Department recognizes that:

- Social media is a primary communication tool for our community and workforce
- Content posted online can remain indefinitely and may be redistributed without consent
- Employee conduct on social media—even on personal accounts—can reflect departmental culture and influence public perception
- The Department values employee free expression and protects rights guaranteed by the U.S. and Arizona Constitutions
- Clear guidelines protect both the Department's reputation and employees' civil liberties
- Public confidence in our department directly impacts community safety, funding, and our ability to serve

APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all Phoenix Fire Department employees and members, including full-time, part-time, temporary, and volunteer personnel. All employees should understand guidelines regarding personal social media use. Additional requirements apply to employees authorized to speak on behalf of the Department.

NOTE: This policy does not restrict off-duty speech that is protected by law.

DEFINITIONS

App – An application downloaded for use on desktop, mobile device, smartwatch, or wearable technology.

City – City of Phoenix.

City Business – All work performed with direct relation to the City's operations, including authorized activities of labor unions and labor associations in coordination with management.

Comment – A response to a post or message on social media sites, including replies, reactions (thumbs up, heart, emoji responses), and threaded responses.

Deepfake – AI-generated or AI-manipulated audio, video, or image content designed to appear authentic but created without consent. This includes manipulated videos, synthetic voice recordings, and altered photographs intended to misrepresent a person's words or actions.

Disparagement – Statements that belittle, demean, or express contempt for individuals or groups based on legally protected characteristics (as defined in A.R. 2.35). Disparagement does NOT include honest criticism of policies, procedures, management decisions, or factual statements regarding working conditions.

Influencer – A person or page who can affect what others think, like, feel, or purchase online. Anyone with attention online who can influence others.

Personal Site – A profile created by an individual on a social media platform for personal use and communication. Personal sites do not include labor union, labor association, or City employee group social media accounts.

Platform – Software or technology that facilitates community, interactive, and user-generated content (e.g., Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Threads, LinkedIn, X/Twitter, Reddit, Pinterest, Bluesky, BeReal).

Post – Content shared on a social media site, including text updates, photographs, videos, livestreams, Stories, Reels, TikToks, audio clips, polls, comments, reactions, and shared links.

Repost/Share – Content shared on a social media site that was created by someone else, including retweets, shares, story reposts, and algorithm-amplified content.

Shortform Video Platforms – Applications primarily designed for sharing brief video content (TikTok, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, Snapchat, BeReal).

Social Media – Online communication channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing, and collaboration, including social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X, Threads, Bluesky), professional networks (LinkedIn), video platforms (YouTube, TikTok, Instagram Reels, Snapchat), streaming platforms (Twitch), forums (Reddit), and messaging apps with public/semi-public sharing features.

Stereotyping – Making broad, generalizations about any group based on characteristics.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. **Employees** are responsible for understanding and complying with this policy
- B. **Department Heads** are responsible for authorizing official spokespersons and notifying the Public Information Director
- C. **The Fire Chief** (who may delegate to the Assistant Chief in charge of Public Affairs) is responsible for administering this policy, authorizing official PFD spokespersons, and coordinating these assignments with the Public Information Officer
- D. **City Clerk Department** is responsible for records retention requirements related to social media
- E. **Human Resources Department** provides guidance on appropriate employee behavior on social media
- F. **Public Information Office** provides guidance on departmental social media representation and training
- G. **Union Representatives (IAFF Local 493)** are available to assist members with questions about policy interpretation and rights

POLICY STATEMENTS FOR ALL EMPLOYEES

Personal Social Media Presence

Employees may express themselves as private citizens on social media sites. However, all personal social media use must comply with copyright laws, data security and privacy regulations, criminal laws, federal, state, and local employment law, and this Department's Social Media Policy.

Employees have the right to express personal political views, personal opinions, and engage in lawful activities. Protected conduct (union organizing, whistleblowing, labor discussion) cannot be restricted or disciplined.

PFD requires the trust and confidence of the public to provide effective services. Therefore, PFD employees must ensure that their activities on personal social media avoid damaging the reputation and trust PFD has with the community. Personal social media activity must not interfere with work duties or the operation of the PFD.

Privacy And Social Media -- No "Private" Posts

There is no such thing as a truly "private" social media post. Privacy settings are not secure. Even "private" messages, stories, or posts with limited visibility can be forwarded, screenshotted, or reposted by anyone with access. Content persists. Deleted posts may be archived by external entities, cached, or captured before deletion.

The "Headline Test": Before posting any content, ask yourself: *"Would I be comfortable seeing this on the news, in a municipal council meeting, shared with my supervisor, or posted in a department meeting?"* If the answer is no, do not post it.

Personal social media postings that relate to co-workers, supervisors, other City employees, workplace activities, or conduct unbecoming a firefighter may be considered in Human Resources investigations, Equal Employment Opportunity investigations, or discipline and conduct review processes.

Disparagement And Stereotyping -- Prohibited

Employees are prohibited from posting social media content that disparages a group or person based on legally protected characteristics, including race, color, ancestry, national origin, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, disability, religious belief or lack thereof, veteran status, or socioeconomic status. This prohibition applies regardless of whether the post is made in a personal capacity.

Disparagement means statements that belittle, demean, or express contempt for individuals or groups based on protected characteristics. Such posts erode public trust and damage relationships with communities we serve. Even personal posts are perceived as reflective of departmental culture. Our profession relies on public confidence and impartial service.

This does NOT include honest criticism of Department policies, procedures, or management decisions; factual statements regarding working conditions or terms of employment; discussion of wages, hours, or conditions of employment; union organizing or labor-related speech; whistleblowing or reporting safety violations; or protected political speech.

Examples of PROHIBITED Conduct: Posts using slurs, stereotypes, or dehumanizing language about any group; memes that ridicule people based on protected characteristics; conspiracy theories targeting specific communities or groups; posts expressing that certain groups are inferior, criminal, untrustworthy, or undeserving.

Ai-Generated Content And Deepfakes

Employees are prohibited from creating, sharing, or amplifying AI-generated deepfakes or manipulated audio/video content intended to misrepresent anyone's words or actions, create false impressions of department conduct or policy, defame individuals or the Department, or spread misinformation about firefighting operations.

Permitted conduct: Sharing factual information about AI and emerging technology; educational posts about deepfakes and media literacy; clearly labeled parody or satire (as long as not disparaging or defamatory).

NOTE: This prohibition does not apply to employees who are reporting false or misleading information shared by others, or discussing factual information about Department operations and policies.

Speaking On Behalf Of The Phoenix Fire Department

Only employees specifically authorized by management may speak on behalf of the Phoenix Fire Department. Unless trained and authorized to do so, you must not:

- Mislead the public into believing you are an official spokesperson if you are not authorized
- Post official Department information on your personal account as if it is your own content
- Use official Department logos, insignia, or seals on personal social media to create the appearance of official Department communication
- Suggest in your personal account that you represent Department policy or official positions

Perception & Professional Appearance: With social media, the lines between public and private, personal and professional can be blurred. Employees identifying themselves as working for PFD should be mindful that they may be creating perceptions about PFD or the City by customers, business partners, and the general public, and perceptions about themselves by co-workers, other City employees, supervisors, and management.

An employee who posts on social media in an account associated with a particular fire station, fire employee group (such as cadets or honor guard) in uniform, from inside a fire station or PFD building, or with a PFD vehicle/apparatus, may give the impression that they are official spokespersons for the City or the PFD.

PFD employees must be especially careful when posting work-related information, featuring themselves wearing a PFD uniform, in the workplace, or displaying the City logo, public safety patches, badges, or PFD vehicles on a personal site. These actions could cause people to believe employees are posting as authorized PFD spokespersons, official PFD representatives, or on behalf of the City.

Identification Of City Employment In Social Media

Employees may include information about working for the Phoenix Fire Department in personal profiles and may share City name, job title, job duties (in general terms appropriate for social media), status updates about your own job promotion or professional advancement, work-related achievements or honors, and personal participation in City-sponsored or Department-sponsored volunteer activities.

When identifying yourself as a Fire Department employee, be mindful of perceptions you create about yourself and the Department among customers, business partners, the general public, and your colleagues.

NOTE: Permitted and prohibited use of City of Phoenix logos and symbols is set forth in A.R. 1.87, "Use of the City of Phoenix Corporate Symbol."

PFD employees must not use their affiliation with PFD to market, sell or endorse any commercial products or services on social media. The overall content of a social media account, rather than individual posts, is considered in determining whether a member's department affiliation with PFD is being used for commercial purposes. The use of the PFD logo on unofficial sites or merchandise is prohibited.

Note on Outside Employment: Any social media activity that is monetized or serves as a secondary source of income while identifying as a Phoenix Fire Department member is subject to existing City and Department policies regarding Outside Employment and thus should be approved through the “Notice of Outside Employment” process in A.R. 2.62.

Commercial Filming And Media Production

All requests from outside businesses, production companies, or "influencers" to film PFD personnel, equipment, or facilities for commercial or promotional purposes must be routed through the **City of Phoenix Film Office** and the **PFD Public Affairs Section**.

NOTE: Business entities seeking to feature PFD in media must obtain a City of Phoenix Film Office permit and written authorization from the Public Information Director. Employees are prohibited from independently negotiating "feature" access or "day-in-the-life" commercial partnerships without this official approval.

City Business, City Time, And City Resources

Employees must be engaged in City business while at work or on City time. Personnel are prohibited from the following:

- Accessing or posting to personal social media accounts in a manner that interferes with official duties or emergency response.
- Using a City of Phoenix email address for personal social media accounts.
- Using City devices or networks for personal social media business.

NOTE: This does not restrict brief personal communication during designated breaks or downtime.

Content Detrimental To Department Mission -- Prohibited

Employees are prohibited from posting on any social media platform any photographs, video, audio recordings, or written content taken on Department property or in performance of official duties that are detrimental to the mission and functions of the Department; undermine respect or public confidence in the Department; could cause embarrassment to the Department or City; discredit the Department or City; undermine the Department's goals and mission; or violate the privacy or dignity of individuals (community members, patients, or fellow personnel).

Examples of PROHIBITED Content: Videos or photos while responding to, during, or after emergency scenes. Videos or photos used to mock or ridicule response efforts; confidential images of department property, equipment, tactics, or floor plans; content showing safety violations or misconduct; personal information about patients or community members; content taken during training presented in a way that undermines training value.

What IS Permitted: Sharing general information about Department activities (with proper authorization); publicly posting photos from official Department events, open houses, or community engagement (following Department photography policies); educational or informational posts about firefighting (without breaching confidentiality).

NOTE: Reporting safety violations to supervisors or appropriate authorities is protected; posting such content on social media without going through proper channels first may violate this policy.

Confidential And Proprietary Information -- Prohibited

Employees are prohibited from posting social media content that contains:

- Personal identifying information (PII) of any individual obtained through the employee's position with PFD
- Restricted City Information as defined in A.R. 1.90
- Confidential Department information including strategic plans, operational procedures (except educational/general information), personnel records, investigation details, patient or victim information, fireground information or tactics, station locations or routes, security vulnerabilities, financial or procurement information, or active incident details (except as authorized)
- Non-public images of Department premises, equipment, property, or floor plans
- Protected health information (HIPAA-protected content)

Exception for Protected Conduct: This prohibition does not restrict employees from:

- Discussing working conditions, wages, hours, or terms of employment with colleagues or union representatives
- Engaging in protected whistleblowing

Reposting Official Department Information

Employees may repost official Phoenix Fire Department information and posts on personal social media sites on their own time using personal devices. You may:

- Share and repost Department news, events, and information from the Department's official website, pages, and social media sites
- Become a fan of City and Department Facebook pages, follow official Twitter/X accounts, and follow other Department social media
- Link directly to the City's website

When reposting Department content, ensure you are sharing from the official Department account, not personal speculation or interpretation.

Decorum And Political Activity

City employees must comply with policies and procedures regarding City elected officials and municipal elections. Detailed guidance is provided in A.R. 2.16, "Employee Political Activity."

Privacy Expectations

Employees have no expectation of privacy for any personal communication or information sent or received via City networks, City devices, or City email accounts. Phoenix Fire Department personnel should expect that any information created, transmitted, downloaded, exchanged, or discussed in public or semi-public online forums using City networks, devices or email may be accessed by the Department at any time without prior notice.

Platforms And Emerging Technology

Content posted on any platform is subject to all policies in Section VI of this document, including the ban on personal commercial use of Department property or on-duty time. Platforms covered include TikTok, Snapchat, Facebook Stories, Instagram Reels, YouTube, Snapchat Stories, Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn, X (formerly Twitter), Twitch, messaging apps with public features, Reddit, and other social media, public messaging, or content-sharing platforms as they currently exist or may in the future.

Guidance:

- Assume all posts will be seen by the public, elected officials, and department leadership
- Even anonymous accounts may be tracked back to the original user, and anonymous postings identified as a violation of policy.

Do Not:

- Post photos/videos from the station, of station property, or with departmental equipment for your own commercial purposes.
- Post video of emergency responses, training, or Department operations without explicit authorization
- Disclose confidential Department information
- Discuss personnel matters or investigations
- Post disparaging comments about your fellow employees
- Post content that identifies you as Department personnel and violates this policy

Be especially cautious about:

- Filming yourself at the fire station or in uniform for posting
- Posting "day in the life" content that could disclose operational details
- Participating in trends without considering departmental impact
- Using these platforms to make disparaging comments or jokes
- Comments on news articles or public posts about the Department or fire service
- Creating "reaction videos" or commentary on fire service-related incidents or policies that disparage or misrepresent operations
- Engaging in heated arguments about City politics, fire service funding, or departmental operations
- Quoting or reposting Department information in ways that misrepresent official positions
- Participating in trending topics that involve disparaging groups or individuals
- Reposting misinformation or "deepfakes"

POLICY STATEMENTS FOR AUTHORIZED DEPARTMENT SPOKESPERSONS

In addition to all policies in the previous section for all employees, employees authorized to speak on behalf of the Phoenix Fire Department must also abide by the following:

Official Social Media Account Requirements

All social media accounts that purport to represent PFD official functions or facilities, including fire stations, fire cadets, the honor guard, the training center or others, are affiliated social media

accounts. Affiliated social media accounts must be approved by the Fire Chief and the Public Affairs Section and Public Information Officers and are subject to closure at any time.

All Affiliated Social Media Accounts must:

- Have an official account spokesperson who is approved by the Fire Chief and who has completed training by the Public Affairs Section
- Maintain PFD's Public Affairs Section as an additional user on the account
- Remain subject to the removal of posts that, in the judgment of PFD's Public Affairs Section and PIO, do not align with PFD's desired social media presence
- Comply with the City's records retention policies
- Follow City standards when creating and managing social media accounts

Authorized Spokespersons -- Extended Social Media Team

All employees who post content for a PFD-affiliated social media account must:

- Be trained and approved by PFD's Public Affairs Section and PIO
- Not use their official roles to disparage the City organization, City elected officials, or fellow employees; not endorse or disparage any commercial products, services, entities, or political candidates; and promptly correct and acknowledge errors made in any posts
- Do not delete any posts unless they clearly violate the City's Social Media Terms of Use. If deletion is necessary, document the reason
- Document unique, non-duplicative posts per the City Records Management Program overseen by the City Clerk. Posting information on social media that is already part of another public record does not require documentation. However, any substantive response to any posting should be documented
- Use appropriate grammar and style when posting
- Do not conduct, advertise, or link to commercial enterprises or products on PFD social media accounts
- Only post electronic media that reflects PFD's high standard of ethical behavior
- Only post content associated or linked with partnering entities or other City departments that has been approved by the appropriate Public Affairs or PIO supervisor before posting. Track time appropriately (hourly employees working overtime must obtain prior supervisor approval)

Privacy Expectations And Public Records

All official Department social media posts are public records subject to public records requests. Therefore, consider all information, including social media postings, potentially open to public view and comply with all records retention policies when posting on Department social media platforms.

Preserving Public Trust

Posts made on behalf of the Phoenix Fire Department directly reflect the Department's values and professionalism. Authorized spokespersons must not use official Department social media accounts to conduct personal business or make political endorsements related to City elections.

Respecting Intellectual Property

Authorized spokespersons must comply with all copyright and trademark laws; provide proper attributions for third-party content; obtain permission before using copyrighted material; and respect intellectual property in all posted media.

Guarding Against Privacy And Security Breaches

Spokespersons should exercise caution when using apps on Department social media sites. Apps may contain malicious software or collect excessive information. Review app permissions carefully; only download apps from legitimate sources; and only use apps that benefit the Department.

Learning And Following Platform Terms Of Use

Authorized spokespersons are responsible for learning and following corporate policies (Terms of Use) on each social media platform; understanding platform-specific privacy and security requirements; and ensuring official Department accounts are set up properly.

PROTECTED CONDUCT AND RETALIATION

Nothing in this policy restricts employees from engaging in protected conduct, including:

- Filing complaints with government agencies, labor boards, or law enforcement agencies
- Reporting safety violations, illegal conduct, or policy violations (whistleblower protections)
- Discussing wages, hours, or terms and conditions of employment
- Engaging in union organizing or union-related activities
- Discussing working conditions with colleagues or union representatives
- Engaging in protected political speech or activities

This policy does not restrict communications that are protected under applicable law.

No employee will be retaliated against for engaging in protected conduct.

PUBLIC RECORDS AND RECORDS RETENTION

City departments are responsible for handling public records requests for comments on Department social media sites; consulting with Law, Human Resources, City Clerk, and Public Information Office before releasing records; maintaining content per its specific retention schedule; and saving and keeping input received on policy or service per retention schedule.

Refer to the City's and the Department's Records Retention Schedule for detailed information.

COMPLIANCE AND DISCIPLINE

Violation of this Social Media Policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. Discipline will be administered in accordance with applicable labor agreements and applicable law.

Examples Of Violations Subject To Discipline

- Posting disparaging content about protected groups (as defined in Section VI)
- Creating, sharing, or amplifying AI-generated deepfakes or misinformation intended to misrepresent
- Disclosing confidential information, patient data, or proprietary Department information
- Using Department resources for personal social media business
- Posting content that undermines the Department's mission or public confidence
- Violating privacy of individuals or breaching security protocols
- Engaging in harassment, threats, or illegal conduct via social media
- Misrepresenting yourself as an authorized Department spokesperson

Examples Of Protected Conduct (Not Subject To Discipline)

- Discussing terms and conditions of employment with colleagues or union representatives
- Filing complaints with labor agencies or reporting safety violations to proper authorities
- Engaging in union organizing or union-related activities
- Participating in protected political speech
- Engaging in whistleblowing protected by law
- Posting information already disclosed through proper legal channels

QUESTIONS AND SUPPORT

For questions about this policy:

- A. **Policy Content & Compliance:** Human Resources Department, (602) 262-6608
- B. **Department Social Media Representation:** Public Affairs Section, (602) 534-0953 or Department Lead PIO
- C. **Union Representation & Member Rights:** IAFF Local 493 Union Representative
- D. **Labor Organizing or Protected Conduct Questions:** Union Representative or outside labor counsel: (602) 277-1500
- E. **City Film Office (Business Inquiries):** (602) 262-4850

RELATED POLICIES, STANDARDS, AND PROCEDURES

- A.R. 1.32 -- Media Relations Policy
- A.R. 1.60 -- Public Records Request Processing
- A.R. 1.63 -- Electronic Communications and Information Acceptable Use
- A.R. 1.87 -- Use of the City of Phoenix Corporate Symbol
- A.R. 1.90 -- Data Privacy Risk Management
- A.R. 1.92 -- City of Phoenix Presence on the Public Internet
- A.R. 1.95 -- Data Privacy Program
- A.R. 2.16 -- Employee Political Activity
- A.R. 2.35 -- Equal Opportunity Policy: Anti-Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation
- A.R. 2.38 -- Social Media and Networking

- A.R. 2.99 -- Respect and Civility in the Workplace
- Citywide IT Standards s1.10 Collaborative Technologies
- Citywide IT Standard Operating Procedure s1.2.1 Access to Blocked Sites
- Employee Manual
- Ethics Handbook
- Department Social Media Policies
- Phoenix Communications Office Social Media Terms of Use

Effective Date And Transition

This updated policy is effective immediately upon adoption. It supersedes the June 15, 2015 version (MP 105.18, 06/15-N).

During the transition period, the Public Information Office and Human Resources Department will provide training and clarification to ensure all personnel understand the updated guidance, particularly regarding emerging platforms (TikTok, Snapchat, AI-generated content, and deepfakes).

Quick Reference Guide For Members

What You CAN DO On Personal Social Media

- ✓ Express personal political views (on your own time, not in uniform, not on City property)
- ✓ Share personal achievements and professional milestones
- ✓ Post about personal interests, hobbies, and family activities
- ✓ Share information about City-sponsored events you participated in (without identifying station or confidential details)
- ✓ Repost official Department news and information from official accounts
- ✓ Engage in professional networking on LinkedIn
- ✓ Discuss fire service issues in a professional and respectful manner
- ✓ Share educational content about firefighting (without breaching confidentiality)
- ✓ Discuss wages, hours, and working conditions with colleagues
- ✓ Engage in union organizing or union-related activities

What You CANNOT DO On Personal Social Media

- ✗ Post disparaging or stereotyping content about any group (race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc.)
- ✗ Create, share, or amplify AI-generated deepfakes or deliberately false content intended to misrepresent
- ✗ Disclose confidential Department information, patient data, or security details
- ✗ Post photos or videos from the station, wearing your uniform, or identifying yourself as representing the Department (unless clearly personal context)
- ✗ Use City time, City devices, or City email for personal social media
- ✗ Misrepresent yourself as an official Department spokesperson

- X Post content from emergency scenes, training, or firefighting operations (without authorization)
- X Engage in harassment, threats, or illegal conduct
- X Share conspiracy theories or misinformation intended to deceive
- X Post about ongoing investigations, personnel matters, or internal grievances (without proper legal authorization)
- X Endorse or campaign for City election candidates (while in uniform or on City property)

The "Headline Test"

Before posting, ask: *"Would I be comfortable seeing this headline on the news, shared with my Fire Chief, or posted in a department meeting?"*

If the answer is NO – Don't post it.

Approved by: Human Resources, IAFF Local 493 Labor Representative, and Phoenix Fire Department Leadership

Contact: Human Resources Department, (602) 262-6608