

## **SOCIAL MEDIA 0691**

(No. 34 March 2012)

### **INTRODUCTION 0691.1**

(No. 34 March 2012)

Social media is increasingly being used by public agencies to communicate with the public. While this form of communication is relatively new, the demand for information through social media has increased.

The purpose of this policy is to set forth guidelines for authorized employees of CAL FIRE who engage and communicate with the public in an official capacity through the use of social media websites on behalf of the Department.

Any authorized employee of CAL FIRE participating in social media sites, forums, blogs, wikis, websites or emerging social communication technologies, during authorized and designated work hours, shall be expected to adhere to these guidelines when posting CAL FIRE related information. Uses of such emerging communication technologies include, but are not limited to: Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Google, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr, etc.

CAL FIRE does not authorize the use of state resources to access unauthorized websites, online social networks, or open source applications without the prior permission by the Executive Office.

### **APPROVAL PROCESS 0691.2**

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Official use of social media sites on behalf of the Department must be authorized by the Communications Deputy Director and coordinated with the Department's Communication Office. Only designated employees authorized by their Supervisor and the Communications Deputy Director may use or post approved information on social media sites. This approval can be revoked by the Communications Deputy Director at any time for inappropriate posts or violations to this policy.

To request authorization to post to approved social media sites, an employee shall complete a [CAL FIRE-320: Authorization For Use of Social Media Form](#) and submit requests to the CAL FIRE Communications Office. The Communications Deputy Director will consult with the appropriate Unit Chief or Program Manager, as well as the Region Chief and Executive Office prior to approval.

Once authorized, an employee may post on approved social media sites: the department's name, logo, contact information, as well as department information, incident information, educational campaign messages, and events that have been approved for release. Authorized employees must adhere to the guidelines and restrictions laid out in Handbook 0600, Section 0691, and applicable rules and department policies.

## **GUIDELINES FOR USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA 0691.3**

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Authorized employees participating in social media on behalf of CAL FIRE are to use the following acceptable guidelines when posting approved content on the Department's social media sites:

- Post only approved updates, information and events.
- Content must be approved by the Incident Commander, Unit Chief, Program Manager or Communications Office.
- Posts should be timely, accurate and professional.
- Ensure permission has been granted to publish any photos, images, logos or videos and provide proper credit for any materials not produced or owned by the Department.
- Posts should be relevant to the public or media.
- Use the CAL FIRE Style Guide for proper punctuation and terminology.
- If corrections or clarifications are needed, keep the response appropriate, polite and respectful.

### **Examples of Approved Posts**

- News release headlines
- Event information
- Incident information
- Fire prevention or life safety messages

## Incident Posting Template

It's important that the public see consistency on Department approved social media sites. While the type of incident, location and specifics may change, the format should not. Establish a template and guideline for the different types of postings including incidents, events and news releases. The criteria may depend on incident type, PIO staffing or time of day.

Example:

**Template:** Firefighters are battling a X acre fire at insert exact location in insert city or geographical location (insert county name County).

**Example:** Firefighters are battling a 25 acre fire at San Gorgonio Ave & Old Idyllwild Rd in Banning (Riverside County).

## Wildfire Incident Posting

The CAL FIRE Website remains the main source and distribution point of wildfire information for fires burning in State Responsibly Areas. Unit approved social media sites can post information and pictures, but must first ensure coordination with the Communications Office. Posts on social media sites should provide links back to the incident's webpage on the CAL FIRE website.

## Official Accounts

When using social media sites to conduct official Department business, use only official Department approved accounts. An approved account must include the CAL FIRE logo or if the account is for a local fire department (Schedule A), a dual logo. Official accounts may be authorized for Units or Schedule A fire departments for posting of incidents, information and events, but official accounts are not meant for individuals.

For example: an account for the San Diego Unit or CAL FIRE / Riverside County Fire Department are appropriate, while an account for Fire Captain John Smith is not.

## Accurate Information

Its imperative that all information released on behalf of the Department is accurate. Confirm all content being posted such as the acreage, percent of containment, evacuation details or other incident information. Any posts on social media sites are immediately visible to the public. If an error is made while posting, quickly correct it, modify the earlier post, and make it clear that it has been updated.

Proofread all information and content prior to posting. While social media is based on timeliness, spelling and grammar errors reflect poorly on the Department. Having a second person proof read the content will help ensure postings are accurate.

## Use Simple Language

Avoid using abbreviations, codes or fire service jargon that may be unfamiliar to the general public. Even though many social media sites do not allow room for much content, try to limit the use of technical language.



## **CONTENT NEEDING PRIOR APPROVAL**

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There are times when notification or coordination between Legal, Fire Prevention, the Executive Office, Natural Resource Agency or even the Governor's Office is required prior to the release of certain information. These are sensitive or high profile issues that require review prior to release. Below are some examples:

- Major incident fire investigations
- Major incident fire cause releases
- Significant law enforcement issues
- State budget
- Legal issues
- Department policy
- Employee injuries (serious) / fatalities
- Staffing levels
- Significant arrests
- Significant arson activity

For these sensitive issues, once the information is approved at the Unit level, they need to be routed through the Region Information Officer and/or Department Information Officer for approval.

## **RESTRICTIONS**

**0691.4**

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All authorized CAL FIRE employees are held accountable for work related content and information they post on CAL FIRE social media sites. When you are representing the Department in an official capacity, the Department is responsible for the content you publish on social media sites. The following is a guideline of inappropriate and unacceptable material or behaviors on social media sites for all authorized CAL FIRE employees that include, but are not limited to:

### **Inappropriate information or materials**

In order to comply with local, state, and federal laws and to protect the Department and its employees from litigation, the following types of information and material should not be posted through social media, whether associated directly or indirectly with the Department:

- a. Material that would constitute harassment, hate speech, plagiarism, defamation or libel. Or material that could be considered obscene, profane, abusive, threatening or embarrassing to another person or entity.

For instance, it is inappropriate to post threatening statements against a coworker.

- b. Material that would violate copyright, trademark, fair use, financial disclosure, or other laws.

- c. Material that would violate individual privacy or patient privacy laws.

For instance, it is inappropriate to post someone's private medical information.

- d. Material that constitutes personal, sensitive or confidential information about or related to any individual's use of the Department's services, even if this information becomes a public record.

For instance, it is inappropriate to post audio recordings of emergency calls to the Department, for the purpose of entertainment.

- e. Material that involves current or potential litigation.

For instance, it is unacceptable to release information from a fire origin and cause report without permission from the Legal Office and the Communications Office.

- f. Material that is confidential information, proprietary information, state government intellectual property, personal identifiable information or other announcements deemed inappropriate for uncoordinated public exchange.

- g. Material that constitutes confidential, proprietary, or non-public information learned of or obtained solely through the employee's position at CAL FIRE.

- h. Material that is pornographic.

- i. Material that damages the public's trust or otherwise interferes with the Department's ability to fulfill its mission.

- j. Material that otherwise does not comply with departmental conduct, ethics and behavior expectations.

- k. Material that is not clearly related to the mission of the Department and/or that may be perceived as personal non-work related information.

- l. Material that is negative towards the Department, its employees, other departments and/or its vendors.

### **No Opinions**

When using approved social media accounts, refrain from posting comments or opinions about controversial issues, personal matters and other non-department material. Always keep in mind that you are representing the department and everything that is posted is a direct representation of the whole department

## **No Endorsements**

Do not make any endorsements or recommendations for products, businesses, individuals, political parties, or candidates. Mentions of certain non-profit organizations may be allowed if the organization is a Department cooperator and the post has been approved by the Communications Office.

## **Don't Post Inappropriate Pictures or Videos**

Caution should be used when posting pictures and/or videos you post on social media sites. Do not post media that may show uniformed or on-duty employees in inappropriate or questionable situations. Use discretion when posting images of accident scenes, camp crews, personnel, etc. Obtain appropriate permissions to avoid violation of any privacy rules. When in doubt, contact the Communications Office for clarification.

## **CAL FIRE EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES**

**0691.5**

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Use of the Internet is a work-related privilege, not a right. This privilege may be revoked at any time. The employees, as representatives of CAL FIRE, have the responsibility of presenting a professional image in their interactions on the Internet or on social media sites. Employees must adhere to this policy. Inappropriate use of the Internet or on social media sites by a CAL FIRE employee may result in disciplinary action, including adverse action or criminal prosecution. See the CAL FIRE [Internet Code of Conduct](#), and the Computer Acceptable Use Policy in the Information Technology Services [Handbook 0900, Section 0910](#).

Consistent with CAL FIRE policy on Electronic Communications, personal use of department resources to access social media sites for non-department related reasons is forbidden. Authorized employees must ensure that access to social media sites does not interfere with the performance of his/her assigned duties or compromise the mission of the department.

Know and follow Department Policy – The expectations set forth in these policies are intended to be read and understood.

**Employee Conduct Policy (HB 1400):** Employees and contractors of CAL FIRE shall adhere to a standard of conduct that ensures respectful treatment of everyone they come in contact with during the course of their employment and work related activities. The Department does not tolerate unprofessional, disrespectful behavior from its employees and contractors at any time, for any reason.

**Computing Acceptable Use Policy (HB 0910):** This policy guides CAL FIRE employees and partners in the acceptable use of CAL FIRE computer systems, networks, and other information technology resources.

In social media, the lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred. Personal social media sites shall not be accessed on-duty or with department resources. Employees with personal social media accounts should be cautious of the public perceptions about the Department purely based on an employee identifying their employment with the Department. Employees should ensure that content posted on personal social media sites is consistent with the Department's Code of Conduct.

## **SUBMITTING INFORMATION**

**0691.6**

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The Communications Office welcomes photos and informational post ideas. Submit requests to the Communications Office, the Region PIO or through your Unit PIO.

The Communications Office will determine which submissions are appropriate to post, as well the best time for them to be posted.

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