

# General Order

## Houston Police Department



ISSUE DATE:

September 9, 2010

NO.

200-41

REFERENCE: This newly created General Order supersedes all prior conflicting Circulars, Directives and General Orders

**SUBJECT: USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

### POLICY

Employees should be aware that information posted on social media sites (including, but not limited to, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook) may be considered part of the public domain, and as such, privacy of the information should not be assumed. While there is no violation of Departmental policy in the mere act of maintaining a page or commenting on social media sites and blogs, the Department maintains the right to regulate the speech of its employees in certain circumstances, which could result in discipline. Employees should also be aware that in some cases, photographs and other materials posted to social media sites may become the property of that site.

Except where required by official duties, no Department employee shall knowingly post to the internet photographs, video images, audio files, or written directives that relate to official Departmental activities (including, but not limited to, crime scenes, photos depicting potential evidence, photos of personnel performing official duties, or offense reports) without prior, express, and written permission from the Chief of Police.

Employees are also cautioned that the posting of images, files, or texts depicting Departmental property, equipment, or personnel, in any manner that reflects adversely against the reputation of the Houston Police Department or the City of Houston may be subject to appropriate discipline.

### 1 EMPLOYEES IDENTIFYING THEMSELVES ON THE INTERNET AS HPD MEMBERS

Members of the Houston Police Department should carefully consider whether or not to identify themselves as such while posting to internet websites. Employees should know that any information posted may remain accessible to the public for an indefinite amount of time, and may impact potential citizen contacts, court-room credibility, and the ability to seek and obtain an undercover assignment within the Department.

While employees are not barred from presenting themselves as HPD members, those who choose to represent themselves as Houston Police Department employees must adhere to the following policies:

- a. Employees shall not post photographs of themselves or other Department members wearing uniforms or other identifying items while in compromising or inappropriate positions, locations, or circumstances.
- b. Employees shall not post photos or images depicting crime scenes, evidence, or city property.
- c. Employees shall not post images of persons, on or off duty, who work in an undercover capacity, or identify them as co-workers, police officers, etc.

- d. Employees shall not post photos, videos, comments, information or other materials that may harm the reputation of the City, Department, or its employees.
- e. Employees shall not discuss or comment on any ongoing investigations, including investigations that have not resulted in final adjudication.
- f. Employees shall not use abusive or inappropriate text to attack colleagues, Department and City policies, or elected/appointed municipal officials.
- g. Employees shall not post derogatory or offensive comments related to their official duties.
- h. Employees shall be mindful that their comments posted to the internet may be perceived as supporting political or social issues, candidate, and/or commercial products. Employees are reminded that Rule 4.8, **Giving Testimonials and Seeking Publicity** and General Order 200-06, **Political Activities**, both forbid the endorsement of political candidates, platforms, and commercial products while in uniform or while representing the police department.
- i. Employees shall not post or release confidential or privileged records or

information made available to them by their capacity as police officers or their position within the Department.

## **2 EMPLOYEES NOT IDENTIFYING THEMSELVES ON THE INTERNET AS HPD MEMBERS**

Employees who elect not to identify themselves as members of the Houston Police Department are reminded that they are still subject to the General Orders at all times. Actions taken while online in violation of the General Orders, even when off-duty, will be subject to appropriate review and disciplinary action.

## **3 RELATED GENERAL ORDERS**

100-07, **Standard Operating Procedures**  
200-03, **Investigation of Employee Misconduct**  
200-06, **Political Activities**  
300-15, **Appearance and Grooming Standards- Classified**  
400-15, **Control of Police Department Property**  
400-25, **Acceptable Use of Computers**  
800-10, **Police Records**  
800-11, **TCIC- NCIC**  
Rules Manual 4.8, **Giving Testimonials and Seeking Publicity**  
Rules Manual 4.18, **Criticism of the Department**

  
Charles A. McClelland, Jr.  
Chief of Police