



Seattle Police Department

DIRECTIVE



June 15, 2011

D 11-035

FYI: Use of Social Networking Sites (Reissuance)

You have the right to remain silent . . . anything you post can and will be used against you

This is true particularly if you are using Facebook, MySpace, Youtube, LinkedIn, Twitter, or any of the other social networking and social media sites on the internet. “[A]lthough these sites provide users with a sense of intimacy and community, they also create a potentially permanent record of personal information.”¹

Attorneys, and others, are increasingly using information obtained from these sites to investigate witnesses, including police officers, in both criminal and civil litigation.² Criminal gang members also are gathering information from such sites.³

Additionally, employers may use information gathered from these sites when conducting background investigations of job applicants, conducting due diligence reviews of employees, and investigating possible misconduct by employees. If there is a connection (nexus) between off-duty misconduct and the employer’s business and the alleged misconduct damages the employer’s business operation or the employer’s reputation, or violates a policy of the employer, then discipline may result, up to and including termination from employment. Examples of such conduct might include publicizing crime scene photographs via a cell phone; texting or posting derogatory comments about co-workers or others; and texting or posting inappropriate comments involving police action in which the author may have been involved.

Employees should avoid posting language that may diminish the morale of Department employees, adversely affect the confidence of the public in the Department’s performance, or tarnish the reputation of the Department in the eyes of the community.

An individual may be held personally liable for posting on social networking and media sites if the information posted is found to be harmful to another person’s emotional state, defamatory, or an impermissible intrusion into another person’s privacy.

Therefore, Department employees are reminded that commons sense holds:

If you don’t want an employer or others to see what you’re posting, don’t post it!


John Diaz
Chief of Police

¹ Ronald J. Levine and Susan L. Swatski-Lebson, “Are Social Networking Sites Discoverable?” Law.com (11/13/08), available at <http://www.law.com/>

² Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department Newsletter, Vol. 09, Number 07, “Impeachment via Social Network Websites”

³ Thomas Watkins, The Associated Press, Tuesday, February 2, 2010, “Use of Twitter, Facebook Rising Among Gang Members”