SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Employees of the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) are required to act in an ethical manner when participating in social media activities. The DEQ’s employees are expected to communicate and demonstrate via social media in a manner that maintains the respect, trust and confidence of elected and appointed officials, agency employees, and the citizens of our state.

The DEQ’s Social Media Policy provides guidance for the DEQ’s employees’ use of social media, which should be broadly understood for purposes of this policy to include blogs, wikis, microblogs, message boards, chatrooms, electronic newsletters, online forums, social networking sites, and other sites and services that permit users to share information with others in the current manner e.g., Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, SnapChat, etc.

The following principles apply to professional use of social media on behalf of the DEQ, as well as personal use of social media when referencing the DEQ.

Social Media Use for Work

- Employees should be aware and adhere to the DEQ’s Professional Code of Conduct, Acceptable Use Policy and the Social Media Policy when using social media regarding the DEQ.
- Employees may engage in social media activity during work time, provided it is directly related to their work, approved by their manager, and does not reference DEQ’s patrons, vendors (e.g., companies, nonprofit entities) or any related entities without express permission.
- Employees should be aware of the effect their actions may have on their professional and personal images, professional reputation, as well as the DEQ’s image and reputation. The information that employees post or publish may be public information.
- Employees should be aware that the DEQ may observe content and information made available by the DEQ’s employees through social media. Employees should use their best judgment in posting material that is neither inappropriate nor harmful to the DEQ, its employees, or customers.
- Although not an exhaustive list, some specific examples of prohibited social media conduct include posting commentary, content, or images that are defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous, or that can create a hostile work environment.
- Employees are not to publish, post or release any information that is considered confidential or “not public.” Employees must verify that the information is appropriate prior to releasing or posting information. Employees should contact the DEQ’s Division of Human Resources or the DEQ’s Division of Public Affairs and his/her supervisor to seek approval of the proposed posts.
- Social media networks, blogs and other types of online content sometimes generate press and media attention or legal questions. Employees should refer these inquiries to the authorized DEQ spokesperson(s) located in the DEQ’s Division of Public Affairs.
- If employees encounter a situation (while using social media) that threatens to become antagonistic, employees should disengage from the dialogue in a polite manner and seek the advice of a supervisor.
- Employees should obtain the appropriate permission prior to posting images of work-related information, web links, etc.; or referring to current or former employees, members, vendors or suppliers. Additionally, employees should obtain the appropriate permission to
use a third party's copyrights, copyrighted material, trademarks, service marks or other intellectual property.

➢ Employees should not use social media to criticize those who compete with or disagree with the DEQ’s viewpoints.
➢ Employees should not use social media to discuss or announce the DEQ’s management discussions regarding DEQ’s performance goals, internal communications, etc.

**Social Media Use for Personal Use**

➢ Social media use should not interfere with an employee’s responsibilities at the DEQ. The DEQ’s computer systems are to be used mainly for business purposes, however, reasonable personal use is permitted (please refer to the DEQ’s Acceptable Use Policy).
➢ After-work hours (personal) online activity should not violate the DEQ’s Code of Professional Conduct or any other State of North Carolina policy.
➢ If an employee publishes content after-hours that involves work or subjects associated with the DEQ or another government agency or related entity, a disclaimer should be posted in a prominent and visible place (noted with each comment or post) to read: “The postings on this site are my own and may not represent the DEQ’s positions or views, strategies or opinions.”
➢ Personal opinions must be expressed in a manner that is respectful.
➢ Employees must ensure that their opinions or social media activity does not interfere with their employment with the DEQ (directly or indirectly) or the work in which they perform at the DEQ.
➢ Employees must ensure that their opinions or social media activity do not interfere with or create the perception of a conflict of interest.
➢ Employees must ensure that their opinions or social media activities does not interfere with the activities of the DEQ (directly or indirectly).
➢ Employees must be cognitively aware that although a message may have been posted anonymously, it may be possible to link or trace the message back to the original sender/author.
➢ Employees must not engage in harassing or discriminating behavior that targets individuals or groups.
➢ Employees must not make defamatory comments that targets individuals or groups.
➢ Employees must ensure that the DEQ’s related social media accounts are separate from personal accounts.

**Discipline**

Subject to applicable law, social media use for work and personal use that violates the DEQ’s Professional Code of Conduct or Social Media Policy or any other State of North Carolina policy may subject an employee to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

*Important Notation:* The DEQ’s Social Media Policy is not intended to restrict the DEQ’s employees’ rights and privileges under the applicable federal or state laws to engage in protected speech. The purpose of the DEQ’s Social Media Policy is to ensure that the social media communication is:

➢ Respectful
➢ Appropriate
➢ Free from a perception of a conflict of interest that would impede the agency’s (DEQ’s) leadership or the employee’s ability to carry out the agency’s mission

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