

## Wisconsin Department of Health Services Social Media Guidelines

The Department of Health Services recognizes the potential value of using social media in communicating important information, increasing knowledge and insight, and building communities. While social media use can be beneficial, it also can pose risks that all employees need to think about before posting comments or content.

The Department has developed these *Social Media Guidelines* to assist all employees and contractors when engaging in social media. If you are an employee of DHS or a DHS contractor creating or contributing to blogs, wikis, social networks, virtual worlds, or any other kind of social media either on or off officially sanctioned DHS sites—these guidelines are for you. These guidelines apply to engagement with all versions of social media regardless of who is sponsoring a blog, Facebook, or other social media site.

The Department has also created a policy providing guidance, criteria, and a process for determining when DHS will directly sponsor a social media site. The policy can be found at <http://dhfswb/mc/sept09/socmedia.htm>. This policy will be used in deciding when to create and implement department-sponsored social media sites.

The Department expects all who participate in social media, whether on behalf of DHS or as an individual who identifies himself or herself as an employee of the Department, to comment in a professional, business-like manner and follow these guidelines.

Social media tools are constantly evolving, so please think of the Department's guidelines as a living document—subject to change and improvement thanks to thoughtful involvement from DHS staff.

### Guiding principles for employee use of social media

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**Think before you “speak” online—social media is really just another professional business setting where you are publicly representing the Department.**

While there is some risk with using social media, there is also great potential. Being comfortable with social media can increase your ability to connect with peers across the state, nation, and world. You can share experiences, lessons learned, and collaborate on ideas. As DHS continues to work on a branding effort, social media can become a big part of it.

If you participate in social media on behalf of the Department, please follow these guiding principles. They are nearly universal in the world of well-utilized social media:

- Pause and think before you post a response to a topic.
- Stick to your area of expertise if it is a program-specific topic.
- Post meaningful, respectful comments.

- Respect proprietary information and content, and confidentiality.
- When disagreeing with others' opinions, keep your comments constructive, professional, and polite.
- Know and follow the DHS **Code of Ethics** and be aware of **privacy considerations** as an employee of this Department. The public expects protection of privacy. It is our duty to ensure sensitive information is never given out; and this includes any sort of social media. Extra caution is required to ensure vigilance.
- What you say can be a matter of public record. It's easy to get caught up in a topic, but consider what happens after you hit the "post" button.
- Do not use DHS-related social media to promote commercial enterprises, harass, "spam," or annoy others. Use appropriate work setting behavior and language—consider how you appear in a social media outlet as another part of your business persona and behave appropriately. For full details, please consult the Department **Code of Ethics**.
- Pay attention to correct spelling and grammar.
- If you plan on using social media on behalf of the Department, you need to notify your supervisor.

Please also keep in mind that while the emergence and rapid growth of social media is exciting and creates new opportunities for the department to reach our clients and partners, existing work rules and standards of conduct still apply and need to be respected and followed. As you engage in social media, it would be worthwhile to re-familiarize yourself with the DHS work rules and with policies governing privacy and confidentiality of information and excessive and inappropriate use of the Internet.

## Rules of Engagement

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**Be sure all content associated with you reflects the best interests of the Department. Shine a positive light.**

- **Be transparent.** Your honesty—or dishonesty—will be quickly apparent in the social media environment. If you are blogging about your work at DHS, use your real name, state that you work for DHS, and identify your role. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, be the first to point it out.
- **Be judicious in what you choose to share.**

Make sure your efforts to be transparent do not violate privacy, confidentiality, and legal guidelines. Never comment on anything related to personal information (either for yourself, other employees, clients, or customers). In addition, legal matters, litigation, or any parties we are in litigation with should not be discussed without prior approval. Also be smart about protecting yourself, your privacy, and any possibly confidential information. What you publish may be widely accessible and will be around for a long time, so consider the content carefully.

- **Write what you know and quote what you don't.** Make sure you write and post about your areas of expertise. Write in the first person and not with the imperial "we." If you publish to a Website outside DHS, please use a disclaimer similar to this: "The postings

on this site are my own and do not necessarily represent the position of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.” Also, *absolutely* respect brand, trademark, copyright, fair use, confidentiality, and financial disclosure laws. Be polite and give proper attribution to sources. Get permission to use copyrighted materials. If you quote from them, cite your source. If you have any questions about these issues, please consult with the Office of Legal Counsel (OLC). Remember, you will be held responsible for your content.

- **Perception is reality.** In online social networks, the lines between public and private, personal and professional, can become blurred. Be sure that all content associated with you is consistent with your work and is in the best interest of DHS. Shine a positive light on your Department by being clear and correct, and posting with a purpose.
- **Focus on adding value.** Billions of words are pouring into social media sites each day. Add value with your comments. Social communication should be a part of our idea of “Protecting and promoting the health and safety of the people of Wisconsin.” Social media can reduce the distance between the agency and the people. If it helps people improve knowledge, solve problems, and stay healthy, then it's adding value.
- **Your responsibility:** What you write is ultimately your responsibility. Participation in social computing as a DHS staff member is not a right but an opportunity, so please treat it seriously and with respect. Please also follow the terms and conditions for any third-party sites.
- **Fix mistakes.** If you make a mistake, admit it. Be upfront and be quick with your correction. If you're posting to a blog, you may choose to modify an earlier post—just make it clear that you have done so.
- **If it gives you pause, pause.** If you're about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, don't shrug it off and hit 'send'. Take a minute to review these guidelines and try to figure out what's bothering you, then fix it. If you're still unsure, you might want to discuss it with your manager or OLC. Ultimately, what you publish reflects on the Department for better or worse and could have personnel implications if you say something that could get you in trouble. So be sure.
- **Seize the day to raise awareness.** Social media provides an opportunity for people to learn more about how DHS can help them. By following the above guidelines, you are doing your part to move the Department forward while allowing us to learn as well.