



Social Media Use Guidelines

Texas A&M Forest Service views social media as an opportunity to enhance communication between the public, stakeholders and the agency. Social media can help achieve agency strategic goals of building public awareness and will to act; and strengthening dialogue with audiences. The purpose of these guidelines is to define the agency requirements relating to the use of social media and to ensure the portrayal of a consistent and accurate message and branding of the agency via online media outlets. In addition, the following guidelines supplement the [A&M System Social Media Guidelines](#).

Definition

Social media - any online media that provides for a user to create and share content or to participate in social networking.

Oversight

The Communications and Marketing Advisory Committee is responsible for overseeing the coordination of all social media activity for the agency and its divisions. For informational purposes, the Executive Team shall be notified of any new social media approved for use.

Agency Approved Social Media

The agency has approved the use of Blogs, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, PhotoShelter, Picasa, Google, Vimeo, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram and Pinterest. The use of TikTok is banned on all government-issued devices including cell phones, laptops, tablets, desktop computers, and other devices capable of Internet connectivity in accordance with state regulations and A&M System guidelines. The use of other social media must be approved through the Communications and Marketing Advisory Council.

General Guidelines and Limitations

1. Employees using social media must maintain a clear distinction between personal and professional uses. Agency social media accounts are to be used only for agency business. Personal social media accounts may be used to publicize agency-related events and activities but must not be used to discuss or critique agency personnel matters, policy decisions or other internal matters. Additionally, social media should not be used to air disagreements with the agency or its cooperators.
2. Employees using either agency or personal social media must not disclose agency security sensitive, confidential or proprietary information.
3. Employees using either agency or personal social media must not post any information, documents, pictures, videos, etc., whose copyrights or intellectual property rights belong to another party. If authorization to post is received from the owner, proper attribution of such rights must be included with the posting.

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4. Inappropriate behavior will be handled at the lowest level possible, but may result in administrative/disciplinary actions or criminal prosecution.
5. Approved procedures for posting videos to social media can be found in the [Informal Video Guidelines](#) document.

Use of Social Media on Emergency Response Incidents

1. All information concerning an emergency response incident may be released upon approval by the Incident Commander or appropriate agency administrator, including photos and videos. This applies to the release of information, photos and videos through agency or personal Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), or any other social media venue.
2. Established, official social media pages are the only pages to be used in reporting incident information. This includes Texas A&M Forest Service, county, city, emergency management office, fire department, other government agency pages, etc.
3. The use of social media on emergency response incidents are subject to all requirements contained in these guidelines.

Use of Personal Social Media Accounts

1. Employees are free to establish and maintain personal social media accounts and websites outside of paid work time, using personal, non-state-owned equipment, devices, and resources. Employees who choose to list their agency affiliation on a personal social media site must apply the same standards of professionalism as outlined in the [Texas Department of Information Resources \(DIR\) Social Media Policy](#).
2. Employees posting agency information and events on personal social media pages, represent the agency and must be mindful to conduct themselves and activity on their pages accordingly.

Use of State Resources for Social Media Accounts

Agency employees must comply with existing state laws and regulations governing the use of state equipment and resources when using social media. Electronic resources such as computers, digital photo and video cameras, and cell phones provided by the agency to employees are official State of Texas resources and are subject to System Policy 33.04 *Use of System Resources*. Use for any other purpose may result in administrative/ disciplinary actions or criminal prosecution against the user. Usage is subject to monitoring and security testing by the agency. The user should have no expectation of privacy except as otherwise provided by applicable privacy laws.

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Establishing and Managing Agency Social Media Accounts

1. Assistant Director, Communications/Marketing and/or designated communications representative will:
 - 1.1 Create and manage agency-level accounts.
 - 1.2 Create and manage division or program-level accounts or may allow a designee to manage those accounts.
 - 1.3 Monitor the content and activity of all accounts for quality assurance, information accuracy, currency and branding consistency.
 - 1.4 Remove or correct any inappropriate content, or have the individual responsible for managing the account do so.
 - 1.5 Back up all content, to include images and multimedia, on agency network files.
2. Division Directors and Department Heads may request the following of the Communications and Marketing Advisory Committee:
 - 2.1 The creation of accounts if program resources are available to maintain and monitor.
 - 2.2 Management responsibilities for maintaining and monitoring the account or page.
 - 2.3 Training on use, maintenance, style and standards of agency social media accounts or pages.
3. Individuals authorized to manage social media accounts are responsible for the following:
 - 3.1 Developing content and strategy for use.
 - 3.2 Organizing and posting content.
 - 3.3 Reviewing, replying, commenting, and approving or denying comments.
 - 3.4 Filling any requests for specific content.
 - 3.5 Removing or correcting any content deemed inappropriate by Assistant Director, Communications/Marketing and/or designated communications representative.
 - 3.6 Setting and meeting annual goals for each account managed.

Records Retention and Open Records

All activities on official agency social media accounts are subject to the State's records retention requirements and are subject to disclosure under the State's open records statute. Employees responsible for maintaining a social media account are responsible for ensuring compliance with these requirements.

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