

# East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department

## Social Media Policy

### **SECTION 1 – OBJECTIVE**

The East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department acknowledges that use of technology by emergency service organizations provides several useful benefits including training and acquisition of useful information for the betterment of the organization and its members. It also allows for the dissemination of information to the public for recruitment, safety education and public relations purposes. As such, East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department embraces the usage of instant technology to that end.

This policy establishes the East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department's social media and instant technology use procedures which are intended to mitigate associated risks from the use of this technology where possible.

This policy applies to all members of East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department, including: Chief and Line Officer, Administrative Officers, Firefighters, Medical First Responders and Support Personnel.

For the purposes of this policy, the term instant technology is defined as resources including, but not limited to, instant messaging, texting, paging and social networking sites such as Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and any other information sharing services, websites and/or blogs.

All East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department social media pages shall be approved by the President or his/her designee. All Social media content shall adhere to all applicable laws, regulations and policies including the records management and retention requirements set by law.

The Internet and other information sharing devices are global entities with no control of users or content. Therefore, available resources may contain material of a controversial nature. East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department is not responsible for information found on the sources.

### **SECTION 2 – POLICY**

East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department understands the value of such technology, but also understands the concerns and issues raised when information is released that violates privacy concerns or portrays this organization to the public in an illegal or negative manner (intentional or unintentional). Therefore, no information, videos or pictures gathered while on East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department business (this includes, emergency calls, meetings, drills, details, training or anything obtained on organization property or at organization functions) may be shared or posted in any format without the approval and written consent of the President or his/her designee. This includes dissemination to media outlets.

Under this restriction, members are prohibited from disseminating or transmitting in any fashion photographs or images of individuals receiving emergency medical assistance. Any such transmission may violate Alabama State Laws and/or the HIPPA privacy rights of such individuals and may result in a

criminal and/or civil proceeding being commenced against members violating this provision of the policy.

This policy is not intended to limit your right to freedom of speech or expression; but as East Limestone Fire Department is a public service entity, it has been put in place to protect the rights of this organization, its members and the public we are sworn to protect. Member are advised that their speech directly or by means of instant technology either on or off duty and in the course of their official duties that has a connection to their professional duties and responsibilities may not be protected speech under the First Amendment. Speech that impairs or impedes the performance of the Fire Department, undermines discipline and harmony among members or negatively affects the public perception of the department may be sanctioned.

As a basic constitutional concept of law, a public employee may comment on a matter of public concern. However, airing personal workplace grievances does not raise a matter of public concern.

In that regard, members must follow the following guidelines when discussing the East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department on Social Media Websites, or other means of digital communication:

1. Do not make disparaging or false statements or use profane language.
2. Do not make any statements or other forms of speech that ridicule, malign, disparage or otherwise express bias against any race, religion or protected class of individual.
3. Make sure that you are expressing your personal opinion and not that of East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department.
4. Do not share confidential or proprietary information.
5. Do not publish any materials that could reasonably be considered to represent the views or positions of the department without authorization.

East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department owns the right to all data and files in any department owned computer, network, cell phone or other information system. East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department also reserves the right to monitor electronic mail messages (including personal/private/instant messaging systems) and view their content, as well as any and all use of the Internet and of computer equipment used to create, view, or access e-mail and Internet content. Members must be aware that the electronic messages sent and received using East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department equipment are not private and are subject to viewing, downloading, inspection, release, and archiving by East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department Officers at all times. East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department has the right to inspect any and all files stored in private areas of the network or on individual computers or storage media in order to assure compliance with polity and state and federal laws.

East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department computer equipment is to be used for fire department business and purposes in a professional and businesslike manner.

### **SECTION 3 – DISCIPLINARY ACTION:**

Inappropriate use of the Internet and instant technology while on East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department business or during the use of East Limestone Volunteer Fire Department computers and other digital equipment may result in disciplinary actions, up to and including termination of membership from the department.