



---

**Guidelines on the use of social networking websites such as  
Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr, Twitter and blogs**

**Document Number** SOP2009-027  
**File No.** 09/1180 (D09/5935)

**Date issued** 8 July 2009

**Author Branch** Ambulance Public Affairs

**Branch contact** 9320 7796

**Division** Ambulance Public Affairs

**Summary** Employees of the Ambulance Service must conduct themselves in a way that promotes public confidence and trust in their organisation. This obligation extends to the manner in which employees conduct themselves when participating in internet social networking forums such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr, Twitter and blogs. These guidelines highlight areas of risk for employees using social networking sites and sets out expected standards of conduct when participating in such forums.

**Applies to** **All Ambulance Service of NSW staff**  
All Operational Staff  
All Administration staff  
All Headquarters staff  
Division staff (select Aero medical, Northern, Southern, Sydney, Western)  
Operations Centres (select All, Aero medical, Northern, Southern, Sydney, Western)

**Review date** July 2011

**Previous reference** N/A

**Status** Active

**Approved by** Chief Executive

**Compliance** with this policy directive is **mandatory**.



**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1. Introduction
2. Use of official resources
3. The internet is a public forum
4. Confidentiality and Privacy Obligations
  - 4.1 Patients
  - 4.2 Operational and other internal information
5. Discrimination, harassment and bullying
6. Union business
7. Removal of material already posted online
8. Related policies
9. Breaches of guidelines and further advice



**Guidelines on the use of social networking websites such as  
Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr, Twitter, and blogs**

**1. Introduction**

Like all public servants, employees of the Ambulance Service must conduct themselves in a way that promotes public confidence and trust in their organisation. This obligation extends to the manner in which Ambulance employees conduct themselves when participating in internet social networking forums such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr, Twitter, and blogs.

While the internet is a wonderful source of information and offers many opportunities to interact widely with diverse groups of people, particular care is required by Ambulance employees when using online media, as information and views can be communicated widely and can be subject to distortion and misrepresentation.

This document highlights areas of risk for employees of Ambulance using social networking sites and sets out expected standards of conduct when participating in such forums.

Significantly, these guidelines apply even if you are participating on-line in your own time and using your own resources, as you will often be identifiable as an Ambulance Service employee, either through your name or other identifier, the contents of your post or by the nature of the social networking forum in which you are participating.

**2. Use of official resources**

The use of Ambulance Service computers, internet and email by Ambulance employees must comply with policy directive *Communications Systems: Use of NSW Health Communication Systems PD2005\_632*. Ambulance employees are not permitted to use Ambulance Service computers, internet and/or email to participate in a private capacity in any online social networking forum.

**3. The internet is a public forum**

As a citizen, you are entitled to comment in a personal capacity on public issues, including through contributions to online discussions and debate. However, you must always be mindful of the public nature of internet social networking forums.

The principles and guidelines which apply to more traditional forms of communication, such as comments made in public meetings, conferences or seminars, or comments to the media, also apply to any comments or material you post on-line.

In particular, you must ensure that any comment or material you post on-line cannot be interpreted as an official statement on behalf of Ambulance. In this regard, you must not use your position title or any Ambulance Service symbol or logo including uniforms. Refer to the *Media Policy SOP2009-023* and the *Code of Conduct SOP2007-012* (paragraph 1.2.7 - Public Comment) for further guidance.



You must also ensure that any comment or material you post online does not compromise perceptions of your ability to do your job in an unbiased and professional manner or bring Ambulance into disrepute. In particular, you must:

- > not make comments online which amount to criticism sufficiently strong or persistent to give the impression that the Ambulance Service is not prepared to implement or administer the policies of the Government of the day;
- > not make comments or raise concerns online about clinical, operational or other Ambulance services or Ambulance policy matters;
- > not raise concerns online about the delivery of related services from another public service agency; and
- > ensure that any comments you make online do not undermine the authority or respect of your colleagues or supervisors.

Refer to the *Media Policy SOP2009-023* and the *Code of Conduct SOP2007-012* (including paragraph 1.1.0 - Competence and professionalism, paragraph 1.3.0 - Use of official resources) for further guidance.

#### **4. Confidentiality and Privacy Obligations**

##### **4.1 Patients**

You must not discuss, disclose or post any patient details online.

As health service providers, Ambulance paramedics and doctors have a duty of confidentiality in relation to information obtained in the course of treating a patient. Other Ambulance employees who assist our health service providers and/or have access to information about patients must also ensure this confidentiality is maintained. Further, all Ambulance employees are required to comply with privacy laws, including the *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 (NSW)* and the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1988 (NSW)*.

It is a criminal offence, as well as a breach of the *Code of Conduct SOP2007-012* to post personal information and personal health information about a patient online, unless in connection with the lawful exercise of official functions. Refer to the *Privacy Management Plan - NSW Health PD2005\_554*, the *Privacy Manual PD 2005\_593* and the *Code of Conduct* (paragraph 1.4.0 - Use of Official Information), for further guidance.



## 4.2 Operational and other internal information

You must not upload or reproduce online any internal Ambulance document and any other material relating to operational duties. Some examples of material which you must not upload or reproduce online include:

- > photographs of accident scenes attended by the Ambulance Service;
- > internal administrative and policy documents, such as Administrative Circulars, Standard Operating Procedures and so on; and
- > internal email communications.

Posting operational and other internal Ambulance documents is a breach of the *Code of Conduct* (paragraph 1.4.0 – Use of Official Information) and may amount to a criminal offence.

You must not use your Ambulance computer network or data system usernames or passwords, when participating in online social networking forums. Also, you must not use your Ambulance email address as your contact email address for any social networking site. Refer to *Security of Ambulance Usernames and Passwords AB2009-003* and *Information Technology Security Policy SOP2007-094* for further guidance.

## 5. Discrimination, harassment and bullying

Online social networking forums encourage and facilitate debate and a diverse range of opinions and views are expressed online. However, as social networking forums are often unmoderated, individuals and/or groups may post comments or material which other users find inappropriate or offensive. Consequently, you must always remain mindful of your professional standing and obligations as an Ambulance employee and consider the potential impact of any comment or material you post online on members of the public and/or your colleagues. In particular, you must not:

- > post offensive or obscene comments or other material online;
- > post racist comments or other material online; or
- > harass or bully another Ambulance Service employee online.

Refer to the *Code of Conduct SOP2007-012* (particularly at paragraph 1.7 - Discrimination, harassment, bullying and violence), the *Harassment Free Workplace Policy SOP2007-069* and *Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination – Joint Management/Employee Association Policy Statement PD2005\_223* for further guidance.



### 6. Union business

This section applies to authorised Delegates of Trade Unions or Unions, as defined in the *Health Department Policy, Trade Union Activities PD 2006\_097*. It is important to note that Ambulance policies and the Code of Conduct apply to all employees. This is not changed by an employee purporting to act on behalf of another organisation.

Union delegates, as defined, may comment publicly on matters relating to union business, provided such comments are approved by and are made for and on behalf of the Union. Documents and material produced by Ambulance and provided on a without prejudice basis during dispute or other negotiations for discussion purposes may be privileged and can not be publicly released or posted on a public site unless there is agreement by all the parties to do so.

Notwithstanding the above, *Media Policy SOP2009-023* and the *Code of Conduct SOP2007-012* continue to apply to delegates in relation to comment. In particular, union delegates must ensure that their online posts do not:

- > undermine the public's confidence in our ability to deliver ambulance services;
- > amount to a criticism sufficiently strong or persistent to give the impression that Ambulance is not prepared to implement Government policies: and/or
- > amount to a criticism sufficiently strong or persistent to undermine the authority of colleagues, supervisors and other managers.

### 7. Removal of material already posted online

If you have posted any comments or material online which breach these guidelines, the *Code of Conduct SOP2007-012* or any other policy or law referred to in these guidelines, you must within one month of the date of this policy remove that material.



**8. Related policies**

Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination – Joint Management/Employee Association Policy Statement PD2005-223

Code of Conduct SOP2007-012

Communications Systems: Use of NSW Health Communication Systems PD2005\_632

Information Technology Security Policy SOP2007-094

Harassment Free Workplace Policy SOP2007-069

Media Policy SOP2009-023

Privacy Management Plan - NSW Health PD2005\_554

Privacy Manual PD 2005\_593

Security of Ambulance Usernames and Passwords AB2009-003

Trade Union Activities PD 2006\_097

**9. Breaches of guidelines and further advice**

A breach of these guidelines may lead to disciplinary proceedings and/or criminal action.

If you are uncertain about the type of material you can post online or any other aspect of these guidelines, you should seek advice from your Station Manager, Divisional Manager or the Professional Standards and Conduct Unit.

Greg Rochford  
**Chief Executive**