

N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

I. Purpose

This document will provide guidelines for use of social media within the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources, in accordance with the North Carolina Office of the Governor's "Best Practices for Social Media Usage in North Carolina," issued in December 2009.

NCDENR recognizes the value of using social media, also known as new media or Web 2.0, as a way to communicate with stakeholders, media, its employees and the public at large. Tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and others are rapidly changing the way information is exchanged and soon, all facets of government will be expected to engage the public using these Internet-based channels.

This policy will establish the following: 1) NCDENR's position on the use of social media as part of its communication and customer service strategy; 2) guidelines and expectations for development and use of social media services in an official capacity; and 3) suggestions for employee's personal use of social media.

These guidelines are applicable to all NCDENR employees or contractors creating or contributing to blogs, microblogs, wikis, social networks, virtual worlds or any other kind of social media housed both on and off state-owned and/or operated servers.

NCDENR expects all who participate in social media in an official capacity, on behalf of the department, to understand and to follow these guidelines.

These guidelines will evolve as new technologies and social networking tools emerge.

II. Social Media Defined

Social media is loosely defined as the generation of Web design that facilitates shareable content, comments, community, collaboration and social networking. It consists of tools such as:

- Wikis
- Blogs
- Micro-blogs such as Twitter
- Social networking sites and platforms such as Facebook
- Media sharing such as YouTube and Flickr
- RSS feeds
- Podcasts
- Widgets

III. NCDENR Position on the Use of Social Media

Social media is important because it is changing the way everyone communicates and works, much in the same way the Internet itself did in the early 1990s.

NCDENR must embrace social media because:

- It provides a more direct way to reach constituents/stakeholders;

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- It promotes transparency in government;
- It fills in the gaps left by the changes in traditional media;
- Government agencies will be expected to communicate with the public in this manner.

Social media provides a new and dynamic way to interact with coworkers, other government agencies, stakeholders and the general public. Used correctly, mindfully and with common sense, it can help NCDENR and its employees build stronger, more successful citizen and agency business relationships.

IV. Use of Social Media to Represent NCDENR/divisions/offices/programs

1. All divisions will sanction official participation and/or representation on social media sites (at the very least the department) in conjunction with department policies. This does not mean that divisions must have a social media site, but that appropriate information about divisions or programs can be shared on department social media sites.
2. Creation and maintenance of all authorized division social media sites will be conducted as part of a division's communication's plan and strategy, as well as that of the department.
3. The NCDENR Office of Public Affairs will:
 - a. Oversee and confirm decisions regarding social media sites including authorization of sites.
 - b. Evaluate requests for usage.
 - c. Verify staff being authorized to use social media tools
 - d. Maintain a list of social media domains, active account logins and passwords
 - e. Change passwords if employee is removed as administrator in order to maintain agency control
4. Once a social media site has been authorized by DENR's Office of Public Affairs, division and agency public information officers must be involved in the site's establishment, content creation and maintenance to ensure division mission and message are being appropriately articulated
5. Division PIOs must have administrator rights to all social media sites.
6. NCDENR division social media sites will allow the public to comment on said sites in order to promote open government, transparency, dialogue between constituents and in order to take full advantage of the benefits of social media.
7. Preferred Social Media Tools
NCDENR divisions will use the following preferred social media sites for outreach, marketing and overall public communication:
 - Social Networking Platform: Facebook (group page; different setup than personal page)
 - Video Sharing: YouTube
 - Photo Sharing: Flickr or Picasa
 - Microblogs: Twitter
 - Blogs: Blogger or WordPress

(NOTE: This list is subject to change, as new products become available and as the technology evolves.)

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V. Content Guidelines for Official NCDENR Social Media Sites

Employees using social media to communicate on behalf of a NCDENR division or agency should be mindful that any statements made are on behalf of state government; therefore, employees should use discretion before posting or commenting. Once these comments or posts are made they can be seen by anyone and may not be able to be "taken back." Great care will be given to monitoring all communication made on behalf of the agency using social media and improper use of social media tools can result in disciplinary action.

Professional Use Guidelines:

1. All agency-related communication through social media outlets should remain professional in nature and should always be conducted in accordance with the agency's communications policy, practices and expectations.
2. Creators, contributors and bloggers should stick to their area of expertise and provide unique, individual perspectives on what is going on at their divisions, and in other larger contexts.
3. Posts should be meaningful and comments should be respectful.
4. Spam, off-topic and/or offensive remarks are not permitted. Communication should not include any forms of profanity, obscenity, or copyright violations.
5. When a response is appropriate, comments will be replied to in a timely manner. Respondents should pause and think before posting a response. Generally, it is not appropriate to post personal opinions, or discuss areas outside of one's expertise on an agency social media site. Employees should always consider whether it is appropriate to commit oneself or one's agency to a course of action. If there is any question or hesitation regarding the content of a potential comment or post, it is better not to post.
6. Keep interactions appropriate and polite when it is necessary to disagree with others' opinions on agency social media sites.
7. Proprietary information, content and confidentiality will be respected. Confidential or non-public information should not be shared.
8. Disclaimers addressing third-party ads should be clearly visible on official sites where applicable.
9. All official NCDENR social media sites will post a statement clearly indicating that comments are welcome where relevant, except for those that contain offensive and inappropriate language.
10. Participation must comply with the posted Privacy Policy of NCDENR and the state of North Carolina.
11. Employees must not use agency social networking sites for political purposes, to conduct private commercial transactions or to engage in private business activities. Employees should be mindful that inappropriate usage of social media can be grounds for disciplinary action. If an account is used for business, the entire account, regardless of any personal views, is subject to these best practices guidelines, including the collection and preservation provisions.

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Be Clear As To Identity:

When creating social media accounts that require individual identification, employees should use their actual name, not pseudonyms. However, using actual names can come with some risks. Any employee using his or her name as part of NCDENR's application of social media should be mindful of the following:

- Do not assume privacy. Only post information that you are comfortable disclosing.
- Use different passwords for different accounts (both social media and existing work accounts). Using the same password for all accounts increases the vulnerability of the accounts being compromised.
- State employees must never use a current NCID password for any social media accounts, in order to protect the operation and integrity of the state information network.

VI. Public Record, Records Management and Preservation

1. Communication through NCDENR-related social media is considered a public record under G.S. 132 and will be managed as such.
2. All comments or posts made to NCDENR division or agency account walls, forums or pages are public, not private. This means that both the posts of the employee administrator and any feedback by other employees or non-employees, including citizens, will become part of the public record.
3. Because others might not be aware of the public records law, NCDENR social media sites should include the following statement (or some version of it) somewhere on the social networking Web site:
"Representatives of North Carolina state government communicate via this Web site. Consequently any communication via this site (whether by a state employee or the general public) may be subject to monitoring and disclosure to third parties."
4. In the spirit of transparency in state government, account administrators who receive messages through the private message service offered by the social media site should encourage users to contact them at a public e-mail address maintained by their agency.
5. For private messages that account administrators do receive, they should be treated as constituent e-mails and therefore, as public records. Account administrators or another authorized staff member should reply using their state e-mail account.
6. All privacy settings should be set to public.

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Preservation of Records. The Office of Public Affairs will ensure that the Department of Cultural Resources has current, updated lists of all active account domain names of DENR social media sites so that DCR can collect and archive most social networking content using an automatic Web harvesting tool. DENR social media site administrators must not delete any information or communication threads before archival harvesting has been completed for a particular scheduled harvest.

If the Department of Cultural Resources notifies DENR's Office of Public Affairs that they are unable to collect the content using the automatic harvesting capability, then DENR must manually archive the public content on their own. Refer to Web Site Guidelines policies on North Carolina Government Records Web site (<http://www.records.ncdcr.gov/erecords/default.htm>).

VII. Special Considerations

NCDENR understands that the cornerstone of social media platforms is interactivity, dialogue and the creation or building of community. However, divisions should take care not engage in any activity when using social media that may create the appearance of any sort of endorsement of a private entity or businesses. Following private businesses on Twitter, for example, could be construed as an official DENR endorsement of that business. In the case of the DENR attractions, where corporate partnerships exist, the attraction's "Friends" group or Society should be encouraged to follow such sponsors on their own Twitter or Facebook pages.

VIII. Employee Use of Social Media

NCDENR recognizes that its employees have a right to use of social media on a personal basis in their lives outside of their professional activities and that such use may include the right to exercise freedom of speech.

At the same time, NCDENR encourages its employees to use common sense when posting to social media sites, especially if referring to work-related activities. Employees should be mindful of blurring their personal and professional lives when administering social media sites. Even though acting in an unofficial capacity, employees should remember they may be perceived by the public as representing the agency and state government as a whole.

When posting off official NCDENR sites in an unofficial capacity but about NCDENR activities, employees are advised to make it clear that the opinions expressed are their own and do not necessarily represent the state of North Carolina's official position.

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VIII. Employee Use of Social Media - continued

Personal Use Guidelines:

1. It is recognized that many NCDENR employees may have personal social networking sites. These sites should remain personal in nature and be used to share personal opinions or non-work related information. This helps ensure a distinction between sharing personal and agency views.
2. Employees should never use their state e-mail account or password in conjunction with a personal social networking site.
3. During normal business hours, employees may use personal social networking for limited family or personal communications so long as those communications do not interfere with their work.
(See "Use of the North Carolina state network and the Internet"
<http://www.enr.state.nc.us/its/pdf/wwwpol.pdf>)