

INTERNET, COMPUTER AND E-MAIL USE POLICY

City of Ferndale, Washington

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to implement guidelines for the use of City computer network resources, including Internet, email, and online information services.

General Policy

Computer network resources are made available to staff as determined by the Systems Administrator and Department Heads to improve communications and information exchange within and from without the City, other local, state, and federal officials, professional and business associates, and to provide information and research resources. This policy sets forth computer network resource restrictions which are necessary to reduce potential liability, the risk of inappropriate uses, and possible adverse perceptions by the general public. Internet, email, and online services are intended for official city business purposes. These computer network resources are not to be used for entertainment, personal communications, other personal use, or illegal, harassing, libelous or obscene purposes during or outside of City business hours. The only exception is for *limited personal use of email on the employee's own time (breaks and lunches)*, subject to limitations and guidelines of this policy.

This policy applies to all computer hardware and software, operating systems, data, and application software of the City and any stored electronic media and other systems that may be connected, such as bulletin boards, Internet and on-line information services. This includes any information in digital electronic format, including but not limited to email, databases, digital images, voice and sound recordings, and any digitized information that may be available.

Internet and Email: Prohibited and Inappropriate Uses

City Computer network resources shall not be used inappropriately. The City provides its employees with high speed access to the internet, with limited content and use restrictions. The City respects the professionalism of its employees to utilize online resources to carry out their obligations with a minimum number of restrictions. These use restrictions include but are not limited to:

1. Seeking to gain or gaining information for inappropriate purposes or unauthorized access to proprietary information. Seeking access to passwords belonging to others.
2. Unauthorized attempts to break into any computer, whether of the City or another organization.
3. Using the Internet or knowingly allowing another to use the Internet for personal profit, personal business, commercial product advertisement, or partisan political purposes.
4. Processing, distributing, transmitting, or displaying inappropriate stored electronic media such as obscene, libelous, or defamatory materials. This includes the downloading, transmission, and possession of pornographic, profane or sexually explicit materials. Other inappropriate uses include, but are not limited to, non-business related chat rooms, Email games, dating and/or pen-pal services, and chain-mail type transmissions.

Activities of the Police Department related to criminal investigations, or personnel investigations by any department in general, or for specific City-related business would not constitute a

prohibited or inappropriate use.

5. Sending threatening, racially, and/or sexually harassing messages.
6. Sending or posting confidential materials outside of the City, or posting City confidential materials inside the City to non-authorized personnel.
7. Infringing on third party copyrights or other intellectual property rights, license agreements, or other contracts; for example: illegally installing or making available copyrighted software.

Permitted Personal Use: Email

Limited personal email communications are permitted subject to the following limitations:

1. Such use shall not occur on City time but is permitted during breaks.
2. Such use is permitted only to the extent that the City does not incur user charges.
3. Personal use remains subject to the Prohibited and Inappropriate Use Policies.

Permitted Use: Internet

1. Employees having access to the Internet shall access those services **for city business only**. Using the Internet for research and access of resources relating to City of Ferndale day-to-day business is encouraged.
2. Accessing the Internet for personal use of any kind is prohibited, exclusive of e-mail use as provided herein.

Use and Privacy Caution

Users should be aware that any computer, whether networked or stand alone, is accessible to other users, and all information on or accessed from the computer is subject to public disclosure.

Never assume that electronic communications can be read by no one except yourself; others may be able to read or access these communications directly, or via a public records request. Never send or keep anything that would be embarrassing or that you would not mind seeing on the evening newscast.

For personal safety and the safety of others, exercise caution when communicating with others. Do not give out your home phone number, home address, or credit card numbers to anyone.

The following guidelines are established for sending e-mail:

1. Do not communicate confidential and/or sensitive issues via e-mail. E-mail is not secure. Never include in an e-mail message anything that you want to keep private and confidential. Personnel issues should never be communicated via e-mail.
2. Racism, sexism, off-color jokes and cartoons, and other inappropriate communications are not tolerated. If you receive such messages, forward them to your Supervisor.
3. Do not send angry messages. Take a moment before you enter an e-mail message. Be

cautious about the words you use and how you say them. Remember that e-mail messages can be printed and forwarded, and that the tone of an email could be misinterpreted by the recipient.

5. Be careful when sending replies; make sure that mail is addressed to the individual or group you want to receive it.

6. Email is best for short messages. A message that takes only one screen is more likely to be read.

8. When sharing documents internally, a best practice is to include the link to the file within the text of the message, rather than to attach the file to the message. An attached file takes up storage space.

9. If communicating with the City Council or Planning Commission via email, blind copy (bcc) Council members and cc appropriate staff (typically department head, City Administrator, and Mayor). By including the City Council as a normal recipient, the risk of a "reply all" increases, which would create an illegal public meeting. Typically begin your email message with "City Council (bcc'd on this message), to indicate to the reader who has received the message.

Computer Security and Oversight

The City's technology provider maintains hardware and software security at all times, utilizing redundant file storage servers. Periodically, the City's technology provider will request that computers are restarted in order to receive new software and security updates.

All email messages are considered to be public records and the public has the right to examine public records. Therefore, if you are concerned about public disclosure or internal disclosure, email should not be used as a communication tool.

Without the consent of the user, sender, or intended recipient, the City may at any time examine all electronic mail, Internet files, and data to determine if such may contain inappropriate information or illegal and prohibited material.