## Section R. Social Media

**Introduction**

This section describes provisions for the use of social media by individuals in their capacity as Auxiliarists. Social media is the evolution and integration of information technology and social interaction through various media including blogs (web logs), Wikis, social networks, Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, social bookmarking, and podcasts. Sustaining a flexible and change-centric organization requires basic understanding of and interaction with social media. Unfortunately, it is impossible to ensure that information passed via social media is complete and accurate, thus its readers have to assume responsibility for judging the validity of the information. Moreover, it is incumbent upon Auxiliarists who seek to post information through social media to ensure all due accuracy and propriety of such information, particularly when their capacity as an Auxiliarist may be linked to the information they post within that social media.

Auxiliarists in a personal capacity, while not assigned to duty, are authorized to make internet posts on Coast Guard-related topics as outlined in these provisions. The Auxiliary performs valuable services throughout the Coast Guard every day, and nobody is in a better position to tell the story than Auxiliarists. Accordingly, Auxiliarists are expected to responsibly engage in internet postings in accordance with the following provisions. They are designed to protect the Coast Guard and its members from any harm associated with a potential unauthorized release of protected or non-public information, and concurrently ensure the Auxiliary image is in keeping with the Coast Guard's core values and ethos. These objectives cannot be overstated. Auxiliarists are therefore expected to ensure that their use of social media neither inadvertently nor deliberately connects or associates, or projects an image of connection or association with, inappropriate material that is not consistent with the Coast Guard's core values and ethos.

Auxiliarists, whether assigned to duty or while acting in a personal capacity, shall not use social media as a mechanism for change or the advancement of positions or policies related to Coast Guard matters. Use of the chain of leadership is most appropriate and expected in such cases. Failure to abide by this tenet may subject an Auxiliarist to the provisions of Chapter 3 of this Manual, up to and including disenrollment.

Auxiliarists must also be aware that some individuals and groups use public networking forums to gain information that will advance their causes. Auxiliarists can help protect the Coast Guard from this threat through due compliance with these provisions.

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| | For the purposes of this section, Coast Guard includes all aspects of the Auxiliary. |
| **R.1. Official Internet Posts** | Official internet posts on blogs, forums, comments to news articles, social networking sites, etc. provide new opportunities to inform and collaborate with the public in many ways. The Coast Guard's approach to online content is similar to its general public affairs policy: to be aware of posts relevant to service missions, policies, and people, and to provide information at the right level and the right time to ensure informed discussions to the extent that resources allow. Accordingly, a measured approach to Auxiliary engagement in official internet posts shall be taken as time, circumstances, and resources allow. |
| R.1.a. Guidelines | Auxiliary national leadership and staff, districts, regions, divisions, and flotillas are authorized to provide information and respond to internet discussion on matters that are within their purview as outlined in the Coast Guard Public Affairs Manual, COMDTINST M5728.2 (series) to ensure the virtual public record has accurate and properly characterized information. Auxiliary units are therefore encouraged to contribute to online content through official internet posts to further public information, discussion, and understanding of Coast Guard Auxiliary roles and missions up to and including their organizational levels (e.g., a flotilla's contributions should stay within the context of its own geographical area and scope of its own activities). Auxiliary public affairs staff officers will facilitate and support Auxiliary units in these endeavors. If required, Coast Guard district and area public affairs staffs will consult on Coast Guard issues that go beyond the Auxiliary district level. The Coast Guard's Office of Public Affairs (CG-0922) will provide the same support at the Auxiliary national level.<br><br>Any such official internet post content must first be reviewed and approved by the appropriate Auxiliary unit elected leader (e.g., the contribution of a division staff officer shall be reviewed and approved by the DCDR (e-mail is acceptable)). If there is any question or apprehension about the content, then it shall be forwarded to the Auxiliary leader at the next higher organizational level. Coast Guard issues that go beyond the Auxiliary shall be forwarded to the Director who shall submit them to the appropriate Coast Guard public affairs office (i.e., district for regional matters and Commandant (CG-0922) for national matters) for comment and approval, with a copy to the Chief Director for national matters. |

The guidelines for release of information outlined in the Coast Guard Public Affairs Manual, COMDTINST M5728.2 (series) apply equally to all modes of public engagement, including official posts to internet sites. Further, the requirements for protecting information outlined in the Coast Guard Freedom of Information (FOIA) and Privacy Acts Manual, COMDTINST M5260.3 (series) must also be followed where they apply.

Formats for responses shall be informal, plain language as outlined in the Coast Guard Public Affairs Manual, COMDTINST M5728.2 (series), and may reflect a first person tone if deemed appropriate. These responses shall focus on factual information and not include defensive or argumentative wording, nor conjecture or speculation. Official responses should include the Auxiliary title and unit of the Auxiliarist making the post.

A disclaimer to ensure neither Coast Guard nor Coast Guard Auxiliary endorsement of the web site is not implied shall be used in all cases when posting content on non-Coast Guard sites. The disclaimer to use is as follows:

> *"This is an official United States Coast Guard and United States Coast Guard Auxiliary posting for the public's information. Our posting does not endorse this site or anything on it, including links to other sites, and we disclaim responsibility and liability for the site and its content."*

**R.2. Unofficial Internet Posts**

Unofficial internet posts refer to Auxiliarists who express their Coast Guard-related thoughts, ideas, knowledge, experience, and opinions by posting any Coast Guard-related information to any Coast Guard or other internet site. An unofficial internet post is a personal expression developed and released by an Auxiliarist in a personal capacity, while not assigned to duty, and that is not initiated by any part of the Coast Guard organization nor reviewed within any official Coast Guard approval process.

Auxiliarists who post content on the internet about the Coast Guard bear a responsibility for ensuring information disclosed, including personal comments, is accurate and appropriate. Moreover, Auxiliarists are expected to remember the Coast Guard's core values and Guardian Ethos, and keep in mind how their posts will reflect upon themselves and the Coast Guard. Unauthorized disclosure of protected information or deviation from the following guidelines may result in disciplinary action, including disenrollment.

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| R.2.a. Guidelines | Identifying oneself by Auxiliary title, position, authority, skill set, or status is authorized. Auxiliarists engaged in unofficial internet posting, however, shall take steps to avoid giving the perception of posting in an official capacity.<br><br>Release of Coast Guard e-mail addresses, telephone numbers, or fax numbers not already publicly released, including the poster's work contact information, is not authorized.<br><br>The posting or disclosure of internal Coast Guard documents or information, including personalized recaps of such information, that the Coast Guard has not officially released to the public is not authorized. This applies no matter how a poster comes into possession of a document. Examples include but are not limited to memos, e-mails, meeting notes, message traffic, articles for Coast Guard publications, white papers, Peloruses, public affairs guidance, and all pre-decisional materials. Additionally, For Official Use Only (FOUO) and Personal Identifiable Information (PII) shall not be released in unofficial internet posts. If there is any question, the poster shall contact the source of the information for guidance and discuss the concern.<br><br>Auxiliarists are responsible for adhering to Coast Guard regulations and policies regarding Operations Security (OPSEC), Information Security (INFOSEC), and the Privacy Act as in all other forums of communication. The Coast Guard Operations Security Program, COMDTINST 5510.24 (series), covers the specifics of the OPSEC program.<br><br>The release of Coast Guard information that is prohibited from release by the Coast Guard Public Affairs Manual, COMDTINST M5728.2 (series) and the Coast Guard Freedom of Information (FOIA) and Privacy Acts Manual, COMDTINST M5260.3 (series) is not authorized. As a general rule, releasing your personal or medical information, although not recommended, is authorized. However, releasing another Coast Guard member's information, as well as classified, operational, proprietary, or investigatory information, is not authorized. |

A photo, video, or sound recording taken at a Coast Guard unit by Coast Guard personnel in any duty status is considered official Coast Guard media, as well as media taken by personnel engaged in a mission away from the home unit. All media that is releasable per the Coast Guard Public Affairs Manual, COMDTINST M5728.2 (series) may be posted unofficially by Auxiliarists. Newsworthy media should be released officially to news organizations in conjunction with or copied to a unit's servicing Public Affairs Office before posting unofficially. All Auxiliary public affairs program personnel are reminded to prohibit the unofficial posting of official Coast Guard media that is not releasable per the Coast Guard Public Affairs Manual, COMDTINST M5728.2 (series), such as law enforcement sensitive, investigation-related, and media that is in poor taste and/or not in keeping with security, accuracy, policy, and propriety. Coast Guard-related media taken while Auxiliary personnel are in a personal capacity, not assigned to duty, from public areas (e.g., a photo of a cutter taken from a public pier) is considered private imagery and is not subject to these provisions.

Use of protected Coast Guard words, emblems, or seals must be approved by appropriate Coast Guard authority, including the Chief Director and/or Commandant (CG-0922) where required to prevent the impression of official or implied endorsements.

Use of Coast Guard office equipment which includes, but is not limited to, government computers, fax machines, copiers, telephones, e-mail systems, and internet access to make unofficial internet posts is authorized as allowed by the instruction Limited Personal Use of Government Office Equipment, COMDTINST 5375.1 (series).

As with other forums of personal public engagement, Auxiliarists shall avoid behavior while acting in a personal capacity, not assigned to duty, that negatively impacts or conflicts with their ability to perform their functions when assigned to duty such as the prohibited personal conduct described in the instruction Standards of Conduct, Lobbying Activities, COMDTINST 5370.7 (series). Auxiliarists should consult their servicing Coast Guard legal office for an ethics determination prior to engaging in internet activity that could violate these standards of conduct.