



Office of the Mayor  
City of Columbus  
Ohio

## COMPREHENSIVE ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

### **Overview and Purpose**

The City of Columbus provides various electronic communications technologies such as electronic mail (e-mail) and voice mail to its employees for usage in performing their duties for the City of Columbus. E-mail, voice mail, telephones, mobile telephones, fax, and paging are all examples of systems with messaging capabilities and are covered by the scope of this policy. All electronic communications using the City's network, voice mail, or any other system or equipment owned, licensed, or operated by the City are considered City property. This document sets forth the City's policy regarding the proper use and access to equipment and services provided by the City to its employees for electronic communications.

### **Statement of Policy**

All electronic communications (e.g. e-mail, voice mail, landline and mobile telephony, Internet and intranet access where applicable, and the use of any communication system owned, licensed or operated by the City) is for the purpose of doing business for the City and performed for its benefit. Utilization of the City's electronic communications services for purposes other than official City business is permitted on a limited basis. Limited, reasonable personal use may include local telephone calls, e-mail communications, and web site visits not otherwise prohibited by this policy. Such limited, reasonable, personal use should be outside regular working hours (ie: lunch and breaks). Employees who violate this policy regarding the use of the City's electronic communications services are subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

### **Internet Access**

Access to the Internet will be established based on the need for this type of service to effectively complete assigned job responsibilities and may not be available to all employees. Access to the Internet via an account established with an Internet service provider (ISP) or through the City's network (MetroNet) must be approved by the employee's direct supervisor. Internet access via the City's network or using a City-owned personal computer shall be only through an account created by the City's Department of Technology. No other form of Internet access shall be permitted from a City-owned personal computer or through the City's network. Internet access accounts through commercial ISP's shall not be established for individual City employees using the City network or a City-owned personal computer. The Department of Technology shall establish Internet access upon receipt of a dated and signed Information Services Action Form (see attached) requesting the establishment of Internet access. It must be signed and dated by the appropriate Division administrator. No Internet access through the City's network or from a City-owned personal computer shall be established without this formal level of request authorization.

Based on job duties, Internet access may be limited to certain sites or may be full range. The City provides Internet access to employees for the purpose of facilitating the completion of City-related job tasks. Internet access must not be used to view or access web sites, bulletin board services, or "chatroom" type services which could be construed as outside the interest of the City or unacceptable within the purview of a public agency. Examples of web sites that should not be accessed through the City's network or viewed on a City-owned personal computer include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Web sites containing explicit descriptions or depictions of sexual or excretory activities
- On-line gambling or betting web sites
- Web sites featuring depictions of full or partial nudity
- Web sites advocating the performance of violent acts against federal, state, or local government authorities or that advocate violence against or harassment of particular groups of people or individuals due to race, age, disability, political affiliation, gender, religion, national origin, physical attributes, or sexual preference
- Web sites containing materials that are in violation of applicable federal, state, or local laws
- Web sites advocating domestic terrorism and/or containing instructions or directions on the manufacture or procurement of illegal explosive devices, chemical weapons, biological weapons, or other weapons of mass destruction

The access to and viewing of web sites such as those described above may be within the legitimate scope of some employees' authorized job activities. Permission to access these types of web sites must be obtained from and documented by supervisory management.

Use of City-owned and/or operated electronic equipment may be monitored. Employees should have no expectation of privacy regarding their Internet access, usage, or any printed or electronically stored records thereof generated by their use of City of Columbus-owned devices. Internet access and usage by City employees may be monitored with or without prior notice to employees; and, reports of Internet access and usage by particular groups of employees or specific employees may be prepared and made available to supervisory or management staff. Employees should notify their supervisor, immediately, of any instances where they have "hit" a "blocked" website while accessing the Internet. Violations of the "Comprehensive Electronic Communications Policy" contained herein, recorded during Internet monitoring, may subject the employee to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

**All assets including software and hardware are owned and maintained by the City of Columbus, Department of Technology.**

#### **E-mail, Voice mail, Intranet Access, Mobile Telephones, Fax, and Paging**

City-provided e-mail, voice mail, mobile telephones, paging, fax systems, and other electronic messaging are intended to be for City business use. This policy acknowledges the existing flexibilities in the use of City-provided cellular phones and permits each department to establish operating procedures that allow limited personal use.

Because the City of Columbus is a public agency, all e-mail messages generated or stored by City employees (whether in electronic or printed format) are subject to federal, state, and local public records laws. As a result, e-mail messages generated by City employees may be monitored, stored, retrieved, disposed of, and/or provided to third parties in accordance with statutes, ordinances, regulations, and policies established by the federal government, the State of Ohio, or the City of Columbus related to confidentiality, access and retention, and destruction of public records. In addition, information provided by the City via the Internet or the City's private intranet environment must conform to the confidentiality and release policies of the City of Columbus.

Non-exempt employees shall not access their City email account (or any other electronic data) during non-scheduled working hours without authorization of the Division Administrator or Appointing Authority.

### **Unacceptable Use**

When using City-provided services, networks, and/or equipment for electronic communication, City employees are expected to use the same professional courtesy that is required in any other verbal or written communication on behalf of the City. City communications systems, equipment, and Internet access may not be used for transmitting, retrieving, or storage or any communication of a discriminatory or harassing nature. Material that would be considered indecent, obscene, or offensive under contemporary community standards is also prohibited.

In addition, City communications systems and equipment shall not be used for transmitting, retrieving or storing any communication, written materials, or images which violate applicable sexual harassment laws or which could contribute to the creation of a "hostile environment" in the context of applicable sexual harassment laws. Harassing communications of any kind are prohibited. No message with derogatory or inflammatory remarks about a group's or an individual's race, age, disability, religion, national origin, physical attributes, or sexual preferences shall be transmitted or stored using City-owned or City-provided equipment or services.

No abusive, profane or offensive language is to be transmitted through the City's e-mail, voice mail, or Internet/Intranet system. Electronic media may not be used for any purpose that is illegal or against City policy or contrary to the City's best interests. Solicitation of non-City business or any use of the City's e-mail, Internet access, intranet access, or networks for personal gain is expressly prohibited.

### **Security**

**City employees must acquire prior approval from their immediate supervisor before taking computer assets (i.e. laptops etc.) from City property, especially during vacations or extended periods.** City employees shall not tamper with the security of City-owned computers, network equipment, services, or files. City employees shall not, without authorization, access or tamper with file records (including e-mails) belonging to other authorized users. Attempts to bypass City computer and network security controls (for example, through use of unauthorized passwords) are forbidden.

To minimize the risk of virus infection, City employees should use only "City provided and supported e-mail services" and not those of commercial Internet e-mail providers (e.g. yahoo.com, hotmail.com, etc.).

Downloading e-mail attachments or other non-corporate files at a PC that does not have an active virus detection program running is prohibited.

To promote and maintain security, City employees shall not share their network passwords or other authentication codes (such as voicemail passwords) with any other person. City employees are directly responsible for any and all activity that occurs under his or her network, e-mail, or mobile phone accounts, just to name a few. If an employee suspects that the security of any of their accounts has been breached, he or she must notify a supervisor as soon as reasonably possible.

### **Copyright Infringement and Plagiarism**

City employees shall not use City-provided electronic equipment, services, or systems to download, copy, transmit, reuse or plagiarize information, written materials, images, photographs, drawings, musical performances, logos, service marks, trademarks, and/or software which is protected by copyright and/or trademark laws or licensing agreements without receiving proper authorization from the holder of rights to the item they seek to obtain. Questions regarding the application of copyright, trademark, and other forms of intellectual property law should be referred to the City Attorney's Office.

### **Confidential Information**

City employees should avoid using City-owned or provided electronic communications systems to send confidential, privileged, and/or sensitive information as such information may be transmitted over unsecured networks and may be redistributed unintentionally to a broader audience with relative ease.

### **Requests for Electronic Access Information**

City supervisory or managerial personnel that suspect a City employee of violating this policy with their email and/or internet usage may make a request to their Departmental Director through their Human Resources Manager for the email and/or internet usage for this employee. If approved by the Department head, this request should be forwarded to the City of Columbus Human Resources Department to review the request for policy compliance and, if indicated, sent to the Department of Technology for action.

Appropriate security personnel within the Department of Technology will provide the requesting department Human Resources manager with the requested Internet access reports for management review and appropriate action.

### **Changes to Modifications**

This policy does not constitute a contract of any kind, and the City reserves the right to modify or alter this policy at any time. The City shall abide by applicable contractual obligations in making such changes and modifications.

### **Questions and Request for Information**

Questions regarding this policy or the appropriate use of City-owned or provided equipment, networks, and/or services for electronic messaging (e-mail, voice mail, telephones, etc.) should be directed to the Human Resources Manager of an employee's department or to the City's Department of Technology Customer Help Desk at 5-5758.

**COMPREHENSIVE ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICY  
REVIEW AND ACCEPTANCE FORM**

By my signature below, I hereby certify that I have read and reviewed the Electronic Communications Policy of the City of Columbus. By signing this form, I agree to abide by the Electronic Communications Policy I also agree to review it periodically for any changes or modifications. I consent to the monitoring of City-owned electronic communications services. I understand that violations of the Electronic Communications Policy may subject me to disciplinary action up to and including termination in accordance with applicable City of Columbus work rules and collective bargaining agreements.

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Definition of Terms**

**Electronic Communication** – any local, regional, or global exchange of information over a private or public data network. Can be initiated by human or non-human agents. The communication can be analog or digital in nature.

**Network** – the technology and hardware designed primarily for the transmission of binary data and/or analog signals.

**Telephony** – “telephone” technology capable of transmitting a variety of signals including voice, data (usually with a modem), fax, etc. Such voice communications over the Internet is referred to as “Internet Telephony”.

**Land Line** – a term for an analog or digital, point-to-point, voice, facsimile or data connection using a public or private network.

**E-mail** – Electronic mail, an electronic message that is transmitted between two or more computers or electronic devices.

**Voice Mail** – a service, provided by a public or private telephony network provider, for the storage and retrieval of spoken messages.

**ISP** – A third party (non-City controlled or operated) Internet Service Provider.

**Web Site** – an Internet or intranet based service sometimes providing a variety of multimedia information via the Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) specification or related derivatives.

**Chatroom or Bulletin Board** – a public or private web site dedicated to the exchange of information between users in real-time or with delay. Also includes services such as “Instant Messaging” (IM) and Internet Relay Chat (IRC).

**Virus** – any self-replicating program or software explicitly designed to damage data and/or interfere with the normal operation of a computer or network. Some viruses are benign, but always undesirable.