Best Practices for the Use of Social Media in Public Safety Communications

APCO ANS 1.112.2-2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD **3**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY **5**

INTRODUCTION **7**

ADMINISTRATION **8**

2.1 Site Management 8
2.2 Records Retention 8
2.3 Decision-Making Authority 9
2.4 Recruitment and Hiring 9

PERSONNEL **10**

3.1 On-Duty Usage 10
3.2 Off-Duty Usage 10

OPERATIONS **12**

4.1 General Considerations 12
4.2 Bi-Directional Community Engagement 12
4.3 Interoperability 13
4.4 Non-Emergency Incidents 13
4.5 Emergency Incidents 14
4.6 Catastrophic Incidents 14

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS **16**

GLOSSARY **17**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS **18**

NOTES **20**

Copyright ©2020 APCO International | All Rights Reserved

FOREWORD

APCO International is the world's largest organization of public safety communications professionals. It serves the needs of public safety communications practitioners worldwide - and the welfare of the general public as a whole - by providing complete expertise, professional development, technical assistance, advocacy and outreach.

The 2020 - 2021 APCO International Board of Directors:

Margie Moulin, RPL, CPE, President
Jason Kern, CPE, First Vice President
Angela R. Bowen, RPL, CPE, Second Vice President
Tracey Hilburn, RPL ENP Immediate Past President
Derek K. Poarch, Ex-Officio

APCO International standards are developed by APCO committees, projects, task forces, work-groups, and collaborative efforts with other organizations coordinated through the APCO International Standards Development Committee (SDC). Members of the committees are not necessarily members of APCO. Members of the SDC are not required to be APCO members. All members of APCO's committees, projects, and task forces are subject matter experts who volunteer and are not compensated by APCO. APCO standards activities are supported by the Communications Center & 9-1-1 Services Department of APCO International.

For more information regarding
APCO International and APCO standards please visit:
www.apcointl.org

ISBN: 978-1-943877-38-6

Copywrite ©2020

APCO American National Standards (ANS) are voluntary consensus standards. Use of any APCO standard is voluntary. All standards are subject to change. APCO ANS are required to be reviewed no later than every five years. The designation of an APCO standard should be reviewed to ensure you have the latest edition of an APCO standard, for example:

APCO ANS 3.101.1-2007 = **1**- Operations, **2**- Technical, **3**-Training
APCO ANS 3.101.1-2007 = Unique number identifying the standard
APCO ANS 3.101.1-2007 = The edition of the standard, which will increase after each revision
APCO ANS 3.101.1-2007 = The year the standard was approved and published, which may change after each revision.

The latest edition of an APCO standard cancels and replaces older versions of the APCO standard. Comments regarding APCO standards are accepted any time and can be submitted to apcostandards@apcointl.org, if the comment includes a recommended change, it is requested to accompany the change with supporting material. If you have a question regarding any portion of the standard, including interpretation, APCO will respond to your request following its policies and procedures. ANSI does not interpret APCO standards; they will forward the request to APCO.

APCO International adheres to ANSI's Patent Policy. Neither APCO nor ANSI is responsible for identifying patents for which a license may be required by an American National Standard or for conducting inquiries into the legal validity or scope of any patents brought to their attention.

No position is taken with respect to the existence or validity of any patent rights within this standard. APCO is the sole entity that may authorize the use of trademarks, certification marks, or other designations to indicate compliance with this standard.

Permission must be obtained to reproduce any portion of this standard and can be obtained by contacting APCO International's Communications Center & 9-1-1 Services Department. Requests for information, interpretations, and/or comments on any APCO standards should be submitted in writing addressed to:

APCO Standards Program Manager, Communications Center & 9-1-1 Services
APCO International
351 N. Williamson Blvd
Daytona Beach, FL 32114 USA
apcostandards@apcointl.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are an estimated 2.65 billion social media users globally as of 2019. This number provides a glimpse of the volume and layers of communication occurring in our communities, organizations and Emergency Communications Centers (ECCs). Both opportunity and responsibility exists for decision makers and leaders exploring how to manage social media in the ECC.

Recent disasters highlight the public's use of social media when the 9-1-1 system was overwhelmed. Following Hurricane Harvey in 2017, Vice Admiral Sandra Stosz of the United States Coast Guard stated, "That's how we rescued the 11,000 people, leaning in on how the public was self-selecting to use social media, because they couldn't get through on 9-1-1 calls." This demonstrates that the public will seek out alternative communication channels to contact emergency services, even if it is not an official public safety-sanctioned platform. Even if the ECC is not prepared.

A survey by the American Red Cross found one in five respondents would attempt to notify emergency responders through email, websites or social media if they were unable to reach 9-1-1. Further, if citizens knew of someone else seeking help, 44% would post a request on their social network for someone else to contact authorities on a friend's behalf; 35% would ask for help directly on an agency's Facebook page; 28% would send a direct Twitter message to emergency responders. Of these same respondents, 74% stated they expected an emergency response in less than an hour following their tweet or Facebook post.

This study introduces a difficult, even unknown, public expectation of public safety agencies and ECCs. It also serves as a warning that ECCs must prepare for these possibilities prior to a disaster and/or consider incorporating social media as an operational tool in their daily workflow prior to a disaster.

This standard was revised to address the evolution and contemporary issues of social media impacting ECCs. Next generation 9-1-1, emerging technologies and the ubiquitous use of social media require standards for the use and management of social media in the ECC. Agency operational policies and procedures can then be created based on the individual needs of each public safety agency.

This working group of emergency communications professionals from various agency sizes and communications disciplines from across the nation came together to address this need. The following standard covers social media usage such as:

- Agency site management – the social media capabilities of a public safety agency
- Personnel usage – both on and off duty while employed with a public safety agency
- Community engagement – as an educational and informational tool
- Operations – as an emergency and non-emergency reporting tool
- Interoperability – interfacing with other agencies

The following foundational policies and procedures are based on what is known today and strived to account for the fast pace evolution of technology. It cannot anticipate all future technology advancements or cultural nuances in the use of the technology and its impact on the ECC. Leaders are encouraged to remain contemporary, aware and flexible with technology changes, and be mindful of the liability associated with the associated potential changes.

Related, but not included in this standard, are auxiliary standards such as:

- Cybersecurity Standard
- Cybersecurity Training Standard
- Public Safety Communications Center Key Performance Indicator Standard
- Next Generation Standard

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

SCOPE

Social media can be an effective communication tool for agencies. The purpose of this standard is to provide a consistent foundation for agencies to develop policies and procedures. This standard recognizes the need for each agency to customize specific policies and procedures to their environment to meet their agency's needs and to protect themselves from liability. Regardless if an agency elects not to use social media in the operational response, proper operational procedures should be developed and appropriately communicated for both official and personal use of social media.

Guidelines for agency employees should be provided in order to warn employees of the potential impact their personal accounts may have on their agency, public trust, or credibility.

Social media also has the potential to be a significant risk to effective communications and data privacy. This standard is intended to minimize some of those potential risks.

Chapter Two

Administration

SCOPE

Social media can be an effective tool for reaching out to a broad audience. Agencies should create policies addressing the administrative functions such as site management, records retention, information release authority, and the use of social media for recruitment and hiring.

2.1 Site Management

2.1.1 Agencies should prominently display their capabilities of social media monitoring for citizens reporting emergencies or non-emergencies.

2.1.2 Agencies should provide alternatives for reporting both emergencies and non-emergencies.

2.1.2.1 Example: "This site/page is monitored 24/7/365 by [agency name] for the reporting of non-emergencies only. If you would like to report a non-emergency by phone, dial [agency non-emergency phone number]. Dial 9-1-1 to report emergencies."

2.1.3 Any official agency-sponsored social media site or page should be clearly identified with the following phrase: "Official social media site of 'agency name."

2.1.4 Agencies should place a disclaimer on the site indicating that information included in posts and originating device identification information are subject to public record and shall be recorded and archived.

2.2 Records Retention

2.2.1 Agencies should record and archive for historical and legal purposes any information posted and received through social media sites.

2.2.2 As with 9-1-1 calls, agencies should determine what and how to record and archive information received through social media. All management of received information shall comply with local, state, and federal laws, while maintaining an orderly and efficient flow of data.

2.2.2.1 Commercial social media tools are available for recording information from social sites (Ex: Buffer, Sprinklr, GovQA, etc.).

2.2.3 Consideration by the agency should be taken regarding the creation and control of digital images taken by agency personnel to protect the privacy rights of personnel, patients, and the public.

2.2.3.1 Agencies should define appropriate types of images taken to include: photographs, video recordings, or electronic files containing graphic images.

2.2.3.2 Agencies should develop policies that address approved devices to capture images during an incident to include helmet cams, dash cams, and drone footage.

2.3 Decision-Making Authority

2.3.1 Agencies should have protocols identifying when social media will be used to communicate with the public.

2.3.2 Agencies should designate a minimum of two people who are responsible for updating, reviewing, and determining what information is posted on the site. The agency should also identify backup personnel for times the designated personnel are not available.

2.3.3 Agencies shall designate who is responsible for social media communications, and an approval chain of command for any external messages.

2.4 Recruitment and Hiring

2.4.1 Agencies should consider using social media as a tool for recruitment and hiring.

Chapter Three

Personnel

SCOPE

Social media is used worldwide. Sharing information, observations, and perspective is a social norm through online platforms while on duty and off duty. Public safety employees' personal and professional social media actions shall be in accordance with their agency's mission statement, vision statement and/or code of ethics.

3.1 On-Duty Usage

3.1.1 Agencies shall prohibit on-duty use from interfering or distracting from job performance and requirements.

3.1.2 Agencies shall develop policies addressing the release of information.

3.1.3 Agencies should have policy and/or procedures for training the employees in the proper use of social media to adhere to the agency's mission statement, vision statement, and/or code of ethics.

3.1.3.1 Agencies should have training materials and testing methodology in order to demonstrate proficiency on the agency's established social media protocols.

3.1.3.2 Employee training should include a review of the agency's standards of conduct pertaining to social media.

3.1.4 Agencies should work with their Human Resources and/or hiring departments to develop a policy on using social media for investigative purposes during pre-hire background checks.

3.2 Off-Duty Usage

3.2.1 Agencies should have policies addressing employee employment identification on personal social media.

3.2.2 Agencies should develop protocols for employees addressing what information is permissible to share on employees' personal page, agency page, and other online platforms.

3.2.3 Employees should not release any media such as pictures, video, and audio recordings, obtained during the performance of an employee's duties, agency-related activities, and any agency responder activities unless prior approval is obtained within the agency's policies.

3.2.4 Agencies shall have a policy regarding the posting of photographs and/or videos of employees and/or coworkers in uniform without the coworker and/or employer's permission.

3.2.5 The employee shall not violate agency or Human Resource policies such as harassment, bullying or retaliatory statements using online platforms, photographs, and/or videos.

3.2.6 Policies addressing the violation of established protocols should be addressed by agencies.

3.2.7 Employees shall not create duplicate or unauthorized agency pages or accounts.

3.2.8 Agency policies should address sharing or commenting on controversial information involving the agency or agency partners.

Chapter Four

Operations

SCOPE

Agencies using social media for citizens to request emergency or non-emergency calls for service should create policy and/or procedure(s). This chapter provides guidance in creating policies related to operational reporting to public safety. Agencies should clearly communicate the operational reporting abilities offered to their communities.

4.1 General Considerations

4.1.1 Agencies shall promote the use of dialing 9-1-1 as the primary means for the reporting of emergencies.

4.1.1.1 Agencies should define and provide examples of what constitutes an emergency or non-emergency within their local jurisdiction.

4.1.2 Agencies should define rules about what pictures and/or video are appropriate to send through social media reporting from the public.

4.1.3 Agencies should develop policies covering the use of any abbreviations, jargon, slang, local references and colloquialisms.

4.1.4 Agencies should develop policies that address social media access and usage by the agency's ECC employees during an incident for research and investigation.

4.1.4.1 Agencies should incorporate a policy for a quality assurance process to review employees' social media work performance.

4.1.4.2 Agencies should address how to validate sources of information before acting on it.

4.1.5 Agencies using social media as an operational reporting tool should include social media in their Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP).

4.1.6 In order to ensure the ECC is able to maintain life safety operations efficiently, agencies should develop a policy regarding the use of social media and posting public information after an incident has been completed or for ongoing investigations to include:

4.1.6.1 The resolution of the incident and key contacts for additional information or questions.

4.1.6.2 Updates and direction on who to contact after the incident for additional information, or to provide information for ongoing investigations.

4.2 Bi-Directional Community Engagement

4.2.1 Information shared with the community should not compromise public safety, officer safety, or potential investigations.

4.2.2 Agencies should consider when to use social media for community notifications regarding in-progress incidents.

4.2.3 Social media should be considered for public education.

4.2.3.1 Examples: When to change smoke detector batteries, when to call 9-1-1, AMBER Alerts, community safety events and other public events.

4.2.4 Agencies should encourage the public to sign up to receive notifications, when available.

4.2.5 Agencies should develop policies for monitoring and responding to social media posts from citizens during an emergency. Agencies must recognize citizens expect immediate information. If agencies do not provide the needed information, the public will seek it from other sources.

4.3 Interoperability

4.3.1 Any content or communications regarding in-progress incidents and/or open and active investigations should be done by the agency-designated decision maker.

4.3.2 Agencies should develop procedures for interfacing with fusion centers or other entities to eliminate overlap in responsibilities or public communication.

4.3.3 Consolidated 9-1-1 ECCs shall work with the agencies for which they dispatch to ensure that a consistent message is relayed to citizens to ensure an understanding of where and how to request assistance from their agency.

4.3.4 Agencies shall have social media site procedures for handling emergencies and non-emergencies reported by non-English or other customers that need additional translation services.

4.3.5 Agencies should consider preplanning with their surrounding agencies regarding social media policy, practices, and any impact on operational response during a major event.

4.4 Non-Emergency Incidents

4.4.1 Agencies should establish policies around the use of research and investigation information obtained during an incident.

4.4.1.1 Examples: Locating next of kin, witnesses to a crime, additional details about an incident or suspect.

4.4.2 Agencies should consider having policy and/or procedures addressing additional non-emergency social media usage, such as real-time community notifications (i.e. road closures, water main breaks), and for situational awareness (i.e. school threat notifications).

4.5 Emergency Incidents

4.5.1 Social media can be a tool to provide information to the public and to receive information from the public during and following emergency incidents, to include large scale, multi-jurisdictional, and multi-day events. If an agency is going to take advantage of this tool, policies and/or procedures shall be in place to identify how that will occur.

4.5.2 Agencies shall promote the use of dialing 9-1-1 as the primary means for the reporting of emergencies.

4.5.3 Agencies shall consider and promote messaging when they are unable to monitor social media due to a significant increase in call volume.

4.5.4 Agencies should consider pre-planning with their surrounding agencies regarding social media policy, practices, and any impact on the operational response during an emergency incident.

4.5.5 Agencies should develop policies for monitoring and responding to social media posts from citizens during an emergency. Agencies must recognize citizens expect immediate information. If agencies do not provide the needed information, the public will seek it from other sources.

4.5.6 Any release of information or public communications regarding the incident should follow the agency's designated decision making policies.

4.6 Catastrophic Incidents

4.6.1 Social media can be a tool to provide information to the public and to receive information from the public during and following catastrophic incidents, to include large scale, multi-jurisdictional, and events with an extended duration. If an agency is going to take advantage of this tool, policies and/or procedures shall be in place to identify how that will occur.

4.6.2 Agencies shall promote the use of dialing 9-1-1 as the primary means for the reporting of emergencies.

4.6.3 Agencies shall consider and promote messaging when they are unable to monitor social media due to a significant increase in call volume.

4.6.4 Agencies should consider pre-planning with their surrounding agencies regarding social media policy, practices, and any impact on the operational response during an emergency incident.

4.6.5 Agencies should develop policies for monitoring and responding to social media posts from citizens during an emergency. Agencies must recognize citizens expect immediate information. If agencies do not provide the needed information, the public will seek it from other sources.

4.6.6 Any release of information or public communications regarding the incident should follow the agency's designated decision making policies.

4.6.7 Agencies should consider back-up plans to incorporate aid within their COOP plan to manage social media reporting

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANS	American National Standards
ANSI	American National Standards Institute
APCO	Association of Public Safety Communications Officials
CAD	Computer Aided Dispatch
COOP	Continuity of Operations Plan
ECC	Emergency Communications Center
NG911	Next Generation 9-1-1
SDC	Standards Development Committee

GLOSSARY

AGENCY: The hiring authority that defines the roles, responsibilities, policies and procedures, and performance standards that direct the activity of the Public Safety Telecommunicator. In multi-discipline centers, the agency governs the operation providing call taking/dispatch and related services to customer agencies. In single discipline centers, a single agency may direct these services for one or more departments within a service area.

CALLS FOR SERVICE: A call that results in the provision of a public safety service or response.

CALLTAKER: A Telecommunicator who processes incoming calls for service through the analyzing, prioritizing, and disseminating of information to aid in the safety of the public and responders.

SHALL: Within the context of this standard, "shall" indicates a mandatory requirement.

SHOULD: Within the context of this standard, "should" indicates a recommendation.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES (SOP): A written directive that provides a guideline for carrying out an activity. The guideline may be made mandatory by including terms such as "shall" rather than "should" or "must" rather than "may".

SOCIAL MEDIA: Any of a number of integrated web-based technology tools that allow users to create content and share that content through various connections.

TELECOMMUNICATOR: The individual employed by a public safety agency as the first of the first responders whose primary responsibility is to receive, process, transmit, and/or dispatch emergency and non-emergency calls for service for law enforcement, fire, emergency medical, and other public safety services via telephone, radio, and other communication devices.

QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESS: A formal assessment process by which actual performance, behavior, and outcomes are compared against established standards to ensure compliance, consistency, and accuracy in the delivery of quality service.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special recognition goes to the committee members that provided their expertise in updating this document to successfully create this candidate standard.

Danielle Ferguson, RPL
Williamson County Department of Emergency Communications
Franklin, TN

Larry Brown
Williamson County Department of Emergency Communications
Franklin, TN

Anthony Covington, RPL
Office of Unified Communications
Washington, DC

Patrick Mignogna
University of Pittsburgh Police Department
Pittsburgh, PA

Amy VanDonk
Prineville Police Department
Prineville, OR

LeAnn Delp, RPL
Essex County Regional Emergency Communications
West Newbury, MA

Timothy Coale
Worcester County Department of Emergency Services
Forest Hill, MD

Justina Hanquet
Valley Communications Center
Kent, WA

Michelle Potts
Chandler Police Department/Communications
Chandler, AZ

Special recognition goes to the Standards Development Committee members that provided their expertise developing the scope and need for this standard and for the support and guidance they provided during the development of this candidate standard.

Karen Allen
SRP Security Services
Phoenix, Arizona

Stephen Ashurkoff, ENP
Comtec Safety and Security Technology

Gary Bates
Pyramid Consulting

Stephen Devine
FirstNet

Bud Hicks, ENP
Grundy County 911
Morris, Illinois

James Leyerle, ENP
OnStar, Retired

Nathan McClure, ENP
Past APCO International President
AECOM, Retired

Daniel Morelos
Tucson Airport Authority (retired)
Tucson, Arizona

Kim Ostin
Sterling Heights Police Dept. (Ret)
Sterling Heights, MI

Jackie Pace
Redwood City, California

Sherry Taylor
Cayman Islands Department of Public Safety Communications, George Town, Grand Caymen

Judith Weshinskey-Price
Pinellas County Regional 9-1-1
Largo, Florida

Megan Bixler
Standards / ACS Program Manager
APCO International

Casey Martins
Resource Coordinator
APCO International

NOTES

APCO International
351 N. Williamson Blvd.
Daytona Beach, FL 32114

www.apcop43.org