

## 4.05 PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

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# PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

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Chief Nathan C. Hagglund		REVISION DATE: 4/26/2024

## I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES

Professionalism, ethics, and integrity are of paramount importance in law enforcement. Employees (sworn & civilian) of a police department, by the very nature of their mission, often encounter people in embarrassing and sensitive situations or circumstances. To achieve and maintain the public's highest level of respect, we must hold to high standards of conduct and appearance, whether on or off duty, and safeguard the information that we collect in connection with our official duties. An employee's actions must never bring the department into disrepute, nor should conduct be detrimental to its efficient operation.

## II. POLICY

It is the responsibility of the West Brookfield Police Department to ensure employees use appropriate discretion when releasing information obtained during their official duties and when using references to the West Brookfield Police Department, so as not to discredit or bring disrespect to the department.

No employee will represent themselves, directly or indirectly, in any public forum as an employee of the West Brookfield Police Department with any information, opinion, or posture that could impair the working relationships of

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the department, impede the performance of official duties, cause disharmony among coworkers, or negatively affect the public perception of the department.

Employee shall not release, distribute, or post any specific information, documents, photographs, or video/audio recordings containing areas of police facilities not open to the public, official business, trainings with sensitive content, crashes, crimes, 911 or other telephone recordings, or work-related assignments conducted by the West Brookfield Police Department without authorization, or in furtherance of the employee's official duties.

Nothing in this policy should be construed as preventing employees of the West Brookfield Police Department from having a personal webpage, social networking site or from posting content which does not bring discredit to the agency.

### **III. DEFINITIONS**

### **IV. PROCEDURES**

#### **PUBLIC DISSEMINATION**

As public employee's department personnel are cautioned that speech, of a nature that owes its existence to the employee's professional duties, whether made on or off duty, is not necessarily protected under the First Amendment and may form the basis for discipline if made in violation of this policy.

All employees shall treat the business of the West Brookfield Police Department as confidential. Department personnel should be aware that privacy settings for social media sites are constantly in flux, and they should never assume that information posted on such sites is protected.

If an employee, expressing themselves socially or in public, gives an opinion on an issue in the field of law enforcement, then that employee shall state that the views and opinions expressed are the employee's personal ones, and not those of the West Brookfield Police Department. Employees shall not express any views or opinions in a public forum that could be detrimental to the department and its operation.

Only information, photographs, and electronic media authorized for release should be discussed with, or disseminated to, non-departmental personnel. Photographs and audio/video recordings of crime scenes,

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collision scenes, 911 calls, or criminal investigation activities should never be made, except for official purposes.

No department employee may disclose or disseminate private information or material, obtained because of their position or official duties, which could compromise an investigation or cause embarrassment to a member of the community who utilized the services of the department.

Denigrating, defaming, or harassing any co-worker in a public forum, through an internet posting, or through a blog is prohibited.

Any actions deemed inappropriate, bringing discredit to this department or to a department employee, or promoting misconduct, whether on or off duty, may be investigated through a criminal or administrative investigation.

### **APPROVAL PROCESS**

Employees seeking approval to use specific information, documents, photographs, or video/audio recordings obtained because of their employment with the West Brookfield Police Department on a personal website, web page, or in another public forum, shall submit a request for approval, including the proposed reference and purpose, to the Chief of Police. The employee will receive an approval or denial of the request. Any changes made to a previously approved posting must be submitted for re-consideration.

### **RESTRICTIONS**

No sexual, violent, racial, or ethnically derogatory material, comments, pictures, artwork, video, or other reference may be posted by any member of the department. Employees shall not post any material on the Internet that brings discredit to or may adversely affect the efficiency or integrity of the West Brookfield Police Department.

Employees should consider the possible adverse consequences of Internet postings, such as future employment, cross-examination in criminal cases, and public embarrassment. Employees must exercise good judgment and demonstrate personal accountability when participating in social events or on social-networking sites. Profanity, rudeness, violence, immoral behavior, or comments regarding personal drunkenness or heavy alcohol use, may not only reflect poorly on the employee, but can adversely affect the integrity of the police department.