



CITY OF SIGNAL HILL Policy & Procedure

ELECTRONIC MAIL POLICY

DATE: 1/26/2022

APPROVED: 

I. PURPOSE

To establish guidelines for the use of electronic mail (hereinafter "e-mail") on the computer network of the City of Signal Hill. E-mail is a business tool, which will be used in accordance with generally accepted business practices and current law, including, but not limited to, the California Public Records Act (Gov. Code, § 6250 *et seq.*), to provide an efficient and effective means of City communications.

II. DISCUSSION

This policy shall apply to all City Officials, Employees, and consultants or other non-employees utilizing electronic communications via the City's computer network.

III. DEFINITIONS

City: The City of Signal Hill, California.

City Business: Information relating to the conduct of the public's business or communications concerning matters within the subject matter of the City's jurisdiction, including, but not limited to, pending or potential City projects, past or prospective City agenda items, or City budgets or expenditures involving City funds.

User(s): Any City Officials, employees (full-time, part-time, temporary and seasonal), volunteers, contractors, consultants, vendors and other persons at the City, including all personnel affiliated with third parties who have access and/or authorization to use the City's e-mail network for City Business.

Official(s): Any elected or appointed City Councilmember or commissioner sitting on a City legislative body. Officials shall also include the City Clerk and the City Treasurer.

IV. POLICY

E-mail is for City Business-related purposes only. All e-mail communications are the property of the City. The City reserves the right to retrieve and make proper and lawful use of any and all communications transmitted through the e-mail system. The City respects the individual privacy of its Users. However, Users cannot expect privacy rights to extend to work-related or City-related conduct or the use of City-owned equipment, domains, or supplies. Consequently, Users shall have no reasonable expectation of privacy in communications sent over the City's e-mail network as e-mail communications are not confidential. For purposes of this Policy, e-mail shall also include all messages transmitted on the internet.

A. Proper Use of E-Mail

1. Communications transmitted over the City's e-mail system shall involve City Business or contain information related to the accomplishment of City Business.

2. Users should not establish and/or use private e-mail accounts for the conduct of City Business. This includes any accounts on Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail, Verizon, etc.
3. Users are responsible for the management of their mailbox and its associated folders. E-mail documents will remain in a folder until deleted. The City, through its MIS department, will not maintain a backup of any e-mail. It is the User's responsibility to make archival copies if desired.

B. Prohibited Use of E-Mail

Users are prohibited from using e-mail to transmit any of the following messages:

1. Messages that disrupt or threaten to disrupt the efficient operation of City Business or administration are prohibited. Messages that publicize a personal dispute other than according to an approved grievance or complaint procedure.
 - a. Messages that constitute or counsel insubordination. Messages that may harm close working relationships.
 - b. Messages that may take employees away from their assigned tasks.
 - c. Messages that may undermine the City's ability to provide public services through its employees.
 - d. Messages that harm the integrity of the system or network.
2. Messages that violate laws, violate individual rights, create potential liability for the City or violate public policy of the State of California are prohibited. These prohibited messages include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - a. Messages which are pornographic or obscene.
 - b. Messages in conflict with the City's Harassment Policy or any other policy prohibiting discrimination, including harassment based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, age, physical disability, mental disability, medical condition, veteran status, marital status, sexual orientation or any other status protected by local, State or Federal law.
 - c. The use of racial, religious or ethnic slurs.
 - d. Messages intended to harass or annoy.

- e. Threats that implicate personal safety.
- 3. Messages that solicit or proselytize others for non-job related commercial ventures, religious or political causes, outside organizations or other non-job related activities.

C. Status of E-mail Communications

- 1. E-mail communications are not confidential and are subject to review by City management and may be subject to disclosure to the public.
- 2. E-mail communications may be subpoenaed or requested under the California Public Records Act and/or may be used as evidence in court or as part of an investigation. The content of e-mail may be disclosed within or outside the City without a User's permission or knowledge.
- 3. City management has the authority to access communications in the e-mail system at any time for any lawful City Business-related reason and may periodically monitor a User's e-mail file.
- 4. The City has unlimited access to protect system security or the City's property rights. However, the City does not routinely monitor e-mail communications and expects that Users will voluntarily abide by this Policy.
- 5. Users must treat confidential e-mail similar to other confidential letters & memos. Such e-mails must be clearly marked as "Confidential" and must not be left on screen for others to read or otherwise be printed out and left for others to read.

D. Penalties for Misuse of E-Mail

- 1. All Users shall be provided a copy of this Policy, upon the granting of access to the City's computer network. Each User shall be required to complete an Acknowledgement (Attachment A), which will be maintained by the Personnel Department.
- 2. Failure on the part of any User to comply with the provisions of this Policy shall subject the User to the suspension or revocation of the User's privilege of using or accessing e-mail and may result in further disciplinary action, including but not limited to termination (for City employees), censure (for City Officials), and/or breach of contract (for City consultants).

E. Records Management

1. E-mail messages, which are intended to be retained in the ordinary course of City Business, are recognized as official records that need protection/retention in accordance with the California Public Records Act. Because the e-mail system is not designed for long-term storage, e-mail communications which are intended to be retained as an official record should be printed out and the hard copy filed in the appropriate subject file.
2. The City and/or Users shall maintain hard copies of all e-mail messages determined by City staff to be official records for a minimum of two (2) years or as otherwise designated in the City's records retention schedule.
3. E-mail communications that do not relate to City Business, are not intended to be retained, or that serve no useful purpose to the City shall be deleted from the system. Such e-mail communications may include, without limitation, spam e-mail.

F. Unauthorized Monitoring of e-Mail

It is a violation of City policy for any User, including system administrators, supervisors, or programmers to use the electronic mail and computer systems for purposes of satisfying idle curiosity about the affairs of others by obtaining access to the files or communications of others with no substantial business purpose or legal authority. Abuse of authority by accessing e-mail for such purposes is prohibited.

G. E-mail Etiquette and Use

1. Remember you are representing the City through your communications both internally and externally, and it is critical that you maintain a positive image for both yourself and the City.
2. Be certain that your message is addressed to the proper person. Be sure you check the list of persons being e-mailed when you choose a REPLY ALL function. E-mail should not be used for broadcast purposes unless the message is of interest to all Users.
3. Capitalize words only to emphasize an important point or to distinguish a title or heading. Capitalizing whole words that are not titles is generally interpreted as shouting.
4. Be professional and careful of what you say about others. E-mail is easily forwarded and blind copied.

5. Be cautious when using sarcasm and humor. Without face-to-face communication, humor may be viewed as criticism. By the same token, also carefully read what others write. The perceived tone may be easily misinterpreted.
6. Some e-mail messages, especially those written in “the heat of the moment” are best unsent. Think twice before sending angry or sarcastic messages or using e-mail to let off steam.
7. Be aware that deleting or erasing information, documents, or messages maintained on the City network is, in many cases, ineffective. Information kept on the City’s system may be electronically recalled or recreated regardless of whether it may have been erased or deleted by an employee. Because of the way in which computers re-use file storage space, files and messages may exist even after a User assumes they are deleted. Finally, information or messages may still exist in the storage area of other Users. Therefore, employees who delete or erase information or messages should not assume that such information or messages are confidential.

H. Viruses

Viruses are often transmitted to networks via e-mail as attached files. Because of this, a User should never open an email attachment (usually Word or Excel documents) if the User does not know the sender.

ATTACHEMENT "A"

CITY OF SIGNAL HILL

USER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: E-MAIL POLICY

I hereby acknowledge receiving a copy of the Electronic Mail Policy. I also understand that any questions concerning this Policy may be addressed to the Director of Finance.

I understand that the City's e-mail system and computer network are for City business only and that I am not to establish and/or use a private e-mail account for City business. I further understand that all information contained on or communicated through the e-mail system and computer network are subject to monitoring, review and disclosure. Consequently, I may not assume that any information stored on or communicated through any City system or network is confidential or private. Finally, I understand that violation of this Policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal (for City employees) and censure for (City Officials).

Name (printed): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____