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**Subject:** Departmental Communications

**Date:** January 15, 2021 at 4:14:01 PM PST

**To:** Grp.PD <[Grp.PD@cob.org](mailto:Grp.PD@cob.org)>

Members,

Some members of the organization thought that it would be prudent to send out a reminder about Departmental Communications. I appreciate their initiative and concern in this area. So, at their request, I'm putting this communication out. The purpose and intent of this e-mail is a reminder to keep your communications professional and work related to your job and the tasks you are performing.

Departmental communications can happen in many forms: MDC messages, work e-mails, work related text messages, voice mails to name some of the more common ones. Your written and tracked worked products (reports, CAD slips etc...), at some point become subject to public disclosure requests. Again, there can be exceptions. My intention isn't to try and name everything that is and isn't subject to Public Disclosure Requests (PDR's). Our agency's subject matter experts and legal department handle those aspects of things.

Our agency and our profession have experienced an increased level of public scrutiny and public disclosure requests for your communications, work products and misconduct history. The rules and laws on this subject have changed over time.

The intent of this e-mail isn't to suggest that we have something to hide or that we, as an agency, have a history or practice of communicating through these means in a bad or negative way. Nor is it trying to single out any one person. However, like many things, it doesn't hurt to put out reminders on topics such as these.

"Tips" (in no particular order):

1. Assume all of your communications are subject to public disclosure. Is your communication something you want to see in the newspaper and then have to explain why you wrote it?
2. Practice good communications retention. Text messages and voice mails are considered transitory.
  - Generally, there is no expectation or requirement to keep or retain them.

- However, if you do keep them and a request for them is made, you have to produce them. I'm sure you've seen the emails from Erin or Brandi.
  - If you regularly purge these items, then the records bureau doesn't have to provide them because they don't exist (it saves work for them).
  - I suppose if there is a text message or voice mail that becomes essential to a case, it can be kept or preserved in a different way.
  - A good suggestion is to delete those things at the end of your work week.
3. Don't assume that because you deleted a text or e-mail that it is gone. It went somewhere, and someone else may have a copy of it in their communications.
  4. "Humor" doesn't belong in your professional work related/based communications.
    - You may think a comment is humorous and harmless when you send it. However, it doesn't mean that others who read it feel the same way (internal members or outside parties).
    - "Humor" is a subjective thing, which can make it risky. People perceive things differently.
    - Simply put, humor isn't professional and doesn't belong in your departmental communications.
    - If you didn't add "humor" in the first place, then you don't have to, possibly, explain the reasons you put in there to an investigator, prosecutor, defense attorney etc.....
  5. Keep your e-mails and voice mail accounts "Cleaned up". If you are done with it and aren't required to keep it, get rid of it.
  6. Know the difference between reply and reply all in your e-mail responses.
  7. If your not sure your communication reads well, have someone else review it prior to sending it.

The above list isn't necessarily "all inclusive". There could be other items to consider.

Please stay safe and feel free to contact me if you have questions.

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My incoming and outgoing e-mails are subject to public disclosure requirements per RCW 42.56.