

***NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE POLICY DIRECTIVE 100-6
SEPTEMBER 20, 2023***

External Affairs

SOCIAL MEDIA

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SUMMARY OF REVISIONS: This is a new Policy Directive. The purpose of this directive is to codify the roles and responsibilities within NWS, guidance provided to NWS offices, and policies from DOC/NOAA/NWS as they pertain to social media.

1. Protection of life and property from weather¹, water, and climate-related hazards requires regular communication with the general public and core partners before, during, and after an event. While not considered a primary means of disseminating official National Weather Service (NWS) forecasts/warnings, the general public and our core partners look to the NWS social media presence as an authoritative voice in the social media environment and as a way to amplify official communication. Social media platforms are also a means to inform the public of NWS and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)-based environmental data and educational/outreach information. Content provided publicly through official NWS social media accounts is considered “non-media official communications” within Department Administrative Order (DAO) 219-1, Public Communication. This directive follows the standards and guidelines for Federal government Web usage and complies with Department of Commerce (DOC) and NOAA policies. This policy directive establishes authorities and provides policy to guide the use of social media technologies and platforms, whether operational or experimental, for all NWS activities.
2. The objective of this policy is for NWS to use social media to supplement² existing communication, collaboration, and dissemination activities in support of the NWS mission. Social media provides another platform for sharing knowledge between government core partners (e.g., Federal, state, local, territorial and tribal), international partners, the media, other key stakeholders and the public to help build a Weather-Ready Nation. While NWS shouldn’t be using social media to provide IDSS support to core partners, by using social media to provide public impact-based messaging, NWS can support and/or augment Impact-based Decision Support Services (IDSS). It can facilitate

¹ In this document, weather is broadly defined to mean all service areas which the NWS supports, including space weather, tsunamis, aviation, fire, marine, etc.

² Dissemination of environmental information via social media is considered a supplemental service. NWS posts will be made on a time-available basis. Availability is also subject to constraints of service availability of the particular social media tool being used.

two-way communication whereby NWS staff has the ability to communicate information on a local level to establish itself as an authoritative information source with the public and core partners. This aids in building the trust needed to heed NWS warnings and products, and act when necessary. Some examples of how the general public and core partners use the NWS social media presence include, but are not limited to:

- Affirming and/or obtaining clarity about weather, water, and climate-related information gathered through traditional dissemination channels.
- Obtaining and reporting weather, water, and climate phenomena and impact-related information, especially when other channels of communication are unavailable.
- Obtaining and disseminating preparedness and educational resources that help to build resilience to environmental hazards.

The NWS participates in social media in order to:

- Ensure relevant, important information in support of the NWS mission is distributed through social media from an authoritative source to help save lives and property by preparing the general public, stakeholders, and decision makers for weather, water, and climate-related events.
- Promote Weather-Ready Nation initiatives through the dissemination of education and outreach information.
- Help counteract misinformation that could cause confusion and jeopardize public safety.
- Arm public officials and core partner agencies with necessary information to help ensure an appropriate public response by affirming and clarifying information communicated through traditional dissemination channels.
- Provide an easy and direct line for real-time feedback from the general public during weather, water, and climate-related events.
- Improve effectiveness of NWS forecasts and warnings through improved situational awareness. This can be achieved by receiving storm reports and other relevant information—as disseminated by the public and core partners—through social media channels.
- Maintain a presence in stakeholder and scientific communities through consistent engagement in this highly visible and interactive media.
- Inform and notify partners and customers of upcoming changes, operating status, and outages of NWS systems.

3. This Directive establishes the following authorities and responsibilities:

3.1. The NWS Communications Division (COMMS) will serve as the national-level program owner for social media in the NWS, providing strategic direction, policies and best practices on the use of social media, evaluating effectiveness of social media engagement, and informing the Office of the Chief Operating Officer (OCCO) of social-media platform and content issues requiring resolution.

COMMS will charter and lead an Emerging Communications Technologies Integrated Work Team (ET IWT) with membership from all Regions, the National Centers for Environmental Prediction (NCEP), OCCO, the Analyze, Forecast and Support Office (AFSO), the Office of the Assistant Chief Information Officer (OACIO), the Office of Dissemination (ODIS), the

Office and Water Prediction (OWP) and the NWS Employees Organization (NWSEO). The ET IWT will investigate and analyze the potential use of social media tools and examine Agency and DOC policy and operational, security, and financial impacts of these tools on the agency before making a recommendation to adopt or discontinue use within NWS. The ET IWT will have the authority to conduct limited, field-contributed prototyping of new/emerging technologies in order to make these recommendations.

Additional responsibilities are as follows:

- a) Will manage and post content, according to the policies described herein, to top national-level NWS social media accounts maintained by NWS Headquarters, with the NWS Operations Center (NWSOC) providing assistance as outlined in the NWSOC Social Media Guidance document (see Appendix 1).
- b) Can recommend removal/deletion for an account by providing justification to the Chief of Staff and the appropriate Office, Center, or Regional Director, and the COO. Accounts for consideration for deletion would be those that are not following policy, or those deemed otherwise unnecessary or duplicative.
- c) Can require removal of a post by working through the Office, Center, or Regional Director for the appropriate office, and OCOO. In cases where the issue is time sensitive, may contact the office directly, while also alerting the appropriate chain of command (including Regional Operations Center). This would only happen in extreme circumstances (example: an inadvertent post from a personal account is quickly gaining attention and needs to be deleted as soon as possible).

3.1.1. The COMMS Social Media and Digital Strategy Lead, or designated proxy, serves as the lead and conduit for national-level messages including those relating to seasonal safety campaigns and interagency activities, and has final authority when it comes to disseminating such messages via NWS Headquarters social media accounts. The COMMS Social Media and Digital Strategy Lead provides counsel on and initiates/coordinates approval through NOAA and DOC for the establishment of new social media accounts throughout the NWS and serves as the Agency liaison with social media providers, such as Facebook and Twitter, for issues relating to all NWS accounts. The COMMS Social Media and Digital Strategy Lead will chair the ET IWT which reports to the COMMS Division Director.

3.2. The NWS Analyze, Forecast and Support Office (AFSO) [includes the 11 National Service Programs (NSPs), Service Program Teams (SPTs), and Mission Support Teams (MSTs)] proposes operational field requirements for social media which are then validated via established governance through the Mission Delivery Council (MDC) utilizing the Capabilities and Requirements Decision Support (CaRDS) process. This includes review and recommendations for prototype or experimental use of social media tools and their potential for becoming operational, as well as discontinuation of social media platforms or tools. AFSO also supports the 10-102 products and services change management process, which must be used for public notification/review of any substantial new social media product or service.

3.3. The NWS Office of the Chief Learning Officer (OCLO) provides training on the operational and policy aspects of social media.

- 3.4. The NWS Office of the Chief Operating Officer (OCOO) adjudicates policy issues, in coordination with NWS leadership/councils, as necessary, relating to the field's use of social media. OCOO also works to resolve operational social-media platform and content issues as raised by COMMS. While COMMS posts national-level information to social media channels during business hours, the OCOO/NWSOC posts to social media during evenings, weekends and Federal holidays, per the agreement with COMMS outlined in the NWSOC Station Duty Manual (SDM) Social Media section.
- 3.5. The NWS Office of Dissemination (ODIS) is responsible for maintaining the infrastructure to support the provision of social media, by providing connectivity, bandwidth, and web platforms affordable within the limits of available resources.
- 3.6. The NWS Office of the Assistant Chief Information Officer (OACIO) ensures NWS offices have guidance on IT risks and challenges (e.g., cyber-security), and possible resolutions for security issues relating to NWS use of social media applications.
- 3.7. NOAA's Office of General Counsel (OGC) provides legal counsel for all technology-related initiatives; identifies legal challenges and possible resolutions; validates that all use of social media is legally compliant with pertinent laws and regulations; and negotiates any amendments to Terms of Service Agreements.
- 3.8. NWS Headquarters and Field Directors are responsible for ensuring compliance by their offices (Weather Forecast Offices, River Forecast Centers, Center Weather Service Units, Regional Operations Centers, National Centers, Portfolios, and Staff Offices), with all aspects of this directive, which ensures use of only DOC-approved applications. Accordingly, these offices are responsible for operational implementation, personnel, content and management oversight of social media in the field. Regional Headquarters, NWC and NCEP will keep COMMS informed about the Points of Contact (POCs) for each account and ensure that passwords are changed each time the POC changes.
- 3.9. NWS Field Offices, Regional Operations Centers (ROCs) and National Centers are responsible for developing, managing and posting content to local, regional and national center social media accounts, respectively. Local/regional/center office management is responsible for directing resources applied to social media operations, consistent with operational priorities.

NWS social media accounts will exist for public-facing NWS offices but not for individual programs, products, groups or people. Some exceptions may be allowed and must be approved by COMMS. NWS offices wishing to create new social media accounts will coordinate with COMMS who upon approval, will submit an application online via the Department of Commerce (DOC) Social Media Application Tracking System.

3.9.1 Operational Units are responsible for maintaining coverage of the use of social media as described here:

- a) Will treat posting to social media as a routine shift duty (as appropriate) and post regularly as to provide a high level of consistency for these services.

- b) Will leverage social media before, during and after weather, water, and climate-related events, and as time and operational duties allow, to:
 - (i) Communicate information and expected local impacts in advance of potential high-impact weather, water, and climate-related events.
 - (ii) Communicate relevant, real-time information during high-impact weather, water, and climate-related events.
 - (iii) Communicate information and expected local impacts in support of recovery operations after high-impact environmental or other events.
 - (iv) Reinforce preparedness plans and information on safety and survival tips.
- c) May utilize social media to obtain credible real-time observations and storm reports in order to improve situational awareness. (Observations will be quality-controlled if used as official data reported.).
- d) Should include the use of social media as part of service backup operations plans.
- e) Should use to keep partners and customers abreast of NWS dissemination system status and operational issues, as appropriate.

3.10. All social media account holders and users are responsible for following guidelines for the use of social media as described here:

- a) Will only use government-issued e-mail accounts and government-furnished equipment to set-up and manage NWS social media accounts. Additional policy/best practices on non-government equipment will be provided as needed for emergency authorization/needs.
- b) Will adhere to the NWS social media posting policies and operational guidelines specific to each social media platform, as appropriate. Additional policy guidance/best practices on the appropriate use of social media will be provided as needed to address usage issues as they arise.
- c) Will only use the official NOAA Emblem and/or the authorized NWS logo on official NWS social media pages. No alterations of any kind shall be made to the emblem or logo.
- d) Will adhere to DOC Ethics Guidance on Use of Social Media, as well as U.S. Office of Government Ethics legal advisory on the Standards of Conduct as Applied to Personal Social Media Use, to avoid blurring personal and professional life when using social media.
- e) Will comply with the Hatch Act and thus not follow, link to, retweet or in any way promote political content hosted by political blogs, political campaigns, partisan social media accounts and websites, questionable “news” sources, websites selling products/services, and/or personal accounts. No content posted to social media shall be related to politics.
- f) Will only use social media outlets that have been approved as part of the DOC application process for managing/posting to official NWS social media accounts and which have been approved through NWS processes such as those described in NWS Instruction (NWSI) 10-102, NWSI 10-103 and/or NWSPD 1-10.
- g) May provide routine information on current weather conditions and forecasts within social media posts; however, use of video/audio weather briefings live or recorded

should only be used to communicate hazardous weather and their impacts.

- h) Will present a presence of authoritative and scientifically accurate, dependable official government information. While creativity is encouraged, offices should keep the authoritative voice of NWS consistent with our products and services.
- i) Will only use materials (e.g., photos, images, graphics, video, audio) directly owned by the Federal government or for which written consent to use in any form has been given by the owner (this includes Creative Commons licenses).
- j) Will incorporate the following best practices:
 - i) Use social media best practices as outlined in the NOAA Social Media Handbook (see Attachment 1 section below).
 - ii) Use social media to provide safety awareness messages (e.g., seasonal campaigns, SKYWARN® Spotter training, outreach events), including short educational posts related to weather, water, and climate facts, and past record events.
 - iii) Identify and build relationships with stakeholders who use social media to amplify information dissemination regarding high-impact weather, water, and climate related events.
 - iv) Follow DOC social media policy (see Attachment 1 below) with respect to third-party endorsements: “Department employees should not post third-party advertisements or otherwise engage in activities that might lead to a conflict of interest, appearance of endorsement, affiliation, or authorization, or otherwise lead the public to believe that your operating unit supports the views, products, services etc. of third-parties.”
 - v) Follow official guidance (Appendix 1, “Guidance for Appropriate Use of Social Media”) for interacting or collaborating with private sector partners via social media, to ensure NWS maintains its commitment to equitable treatment within the Environmental Information Enterprise.

3.10.1 Social media account holders and users must recognize that there are certain things that cannot be done on official government accounts. Specific examples include:

- a) Posting to official NOAA/NWS social media accounts from personal devices such as mobile phones.
- b) Merging/connecting official NOAA/NWS social media accounts with personal accounts.
- c) Posting any content that provides a personal opinion on any subject. Posts should be science or service based, and contain factual information.
- d) Sharing embargoed, privileged non-public, or pre-decisional information (with regard to NOAA/NWS activities or the interaction with outside agencies, partners, or stakeholders) on Agency or personal social media platforms.
- e) Sharing any sensitive personally identifiable information (PII) or business identifiable information (BII).
- f) Unauthorized use or posting of materials protected by copyright, trademark, patent, trade secret, data rights, or related protections for intellectual property.
- g) Endorsing or appearing to show favoritism to private entities in violation of NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 216-112: Policy on Partnerships in the Provision of

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Environmental Information and DOC social media policy (e.g. following or sharing social media posts by one news organization over another).

- h) Posting information that specifically relates NWS forecasts to commercial or private industry venues unless an office is supporting an event in some official capacity or information is urgently needed to alert the public to hazardous weather threatening the event.
 - i) Providing IDSS and/or providing individualized/site specific forecasts using information not already part of our publicly available product suite.
4. The NWS will evaluate usage of social media engagement by measuring the increase in number of followers on national and local level accounts; number of posts; and level of interaction with content.
5. This policy directive is supported by the references listed in Appendix A.

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Kenneth E. Graham
Assistant Administrator
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Date

APPENDIX A -REFERENCES

Federal

[U.S. Office of Government Ethics legal advisory on the Standards of Conduct as Applied to Personal Social Media Use LA-15-03 Hatch Act](#)

Department of Commerce

[Department Administrative Order on Public Communications DAO 219-1](#)
[Department of Commerce Safeguarding Information](#)
[DOC Social Media Policy](#)
[Department of Commerce Twitter How-To Guide](#)
[Department of Commerce Social Media Application Tracking System](#)

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

[NAO 216-112: Policy on Partnerships in the Provision of Environmental Information](#)
[NOAA Mobile Device Management Policy](#)
[NOAA Social Media Handbook](#)

National Weather Service (NWS)

NWS Policy Directive 1-10: [Managing the Provision of Environmental Information](#)
[NWS Instruction 10-102: Products and Services Change Management](#)
[NWS Instruction 10-103: Capabilities and Requirements Decision Support Process](#)
NWS Policy Directive Dissemination [NWSPD 10-17](#) and NWS Instruction
Complementary Dissemination Services [NWSI 10-1704](#)
[NWS Instruction 10-517, Multi-Purpose Weather Products Specification](#)
[NWS Instruction 10-1722 for Instant Messaging \(IM\) Communications](#)
[NWS Facebook Operations Guide](#)
Facebook Posting Policy (see “General Information” section under “Page Info” at link
<https://www.facebook.com/NWS/info>)
[Guidance for Appropriate Use of Social Media](#)
[NWS Social Media Policy/Guidance Google Site](#)
[NWS Twitter Operations Guide](#)
[NWS Operations Center Social Media Guidance](#)