



## RAILROAD COMMISSION OF TEXAS

# Social Media Guidelines

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## Introduction

The Railroad Commission of Texas (RRC) recognizes social media networks have become an instrumental channel for communicating with the public and therefore, this document formalizes the guidelines for social media practices within the RRC. Social media sites refer to websites that facilitate user participation, networking, and collaboration through the submission of user generated content. A social media identity is a specific user account that has been registered on a third party social media site. Social media platforms include, but are not limited to blogs, web forums, chat rooms, and websites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube.

The purposes of RRC's social media accounts include:

- Improving transparency within government;
- Educating the public of the agency's mission and accomplishments; and
- Rapid response communications to a statewide audience in the event of an emergency.

This document outlines the guidelines for RRC's social media use. In addition to the topics addressed here, social media content must be in compliance with the RRC's relevant policies, including its harassment and discrimination policies, confidentiality policies, code of conduct, and other policies.

## Guidelines for Authorized Social Media Staff

### Social Media Staff and Responsibilities

The RRC Executive Director and Communications Division Director will determine the appropriateness of social media use and designate certain employees as authorized users of RRC social media accounts. Employees authorized to represent RRC through the use of social media must read, understand and follow these guidelines. The Communications Division exclusively controls and is responsible for monitoring RRC social media accounts 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. No other RRC division, department, office, or program with the exception of the Commissioners' offices may utilize social media tools or create a social media page to conduct agency business without prior consent from the Communications Division.

Authorized users are expected to exercise reasonable judgment in interpreting these guidelines and making decisions regarding the use of social media accounts. If an employee has questions regarding the application or meaning of these guidelines, he or she should seek clarification from appropriate management. Failure to observe these guidelines may subject individuals to disciplinary action.



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Authorized employees will not post confidential information, lobby, or post politically partisan comments.

### **Moderation**

To protect confidentiality, factuality, and avoid harassing or other inappropriate language or comments, posts and comments on RRC social media channels will be monitored and moderated regularly. Below is a non-exhaustive list of possible scenarios in which RRC may remove social media posts or comments.

A posting or comment may be removed from a RRC social media account at the sole discretion of the RRC if it:

- Is off subject or out of context;
- Contains obscenity;
- Contains sensitive personal information;
- Contains offensive terms that target protected classes;
- Is threatening, harassing, or discriminatory;
- Incites or promotes violence or illegal activities;
- Contains information that could reasonably be construed to compromise public safety;
- Advertises or promotes a commercial product, service, or any entity or individual;
- Promotes or endorses political campaigns or candidates; and
- Appears to be or contain any type of SPAM or information, such as advertisements, disseminated in mass content.
- If a comment explicitly states an employee's name, the comment will not be permitted without employee approval.

RRC employees who monitor and moderate content on social media channels are not required to provide an explanation for removing content, but may choose to do so.

### **RRC's Response**

The primary purpose of the RRC's social media channels will be to distribute information about the RRC. There may be circumstances in which the RRC engages in a dialogue utilizing social media. Authorized employees will monitor and respond on behalf of the agency through the RRC social media accounts and not personal accounts. Below are approaches to take when RRC social media accounts respond to comments:

- If the comment is bashing, degrading, ranting, or satirical in nature, avoid responding, but monitor for relevant information and comments;
- If there are erroneous facts, consider responding with factual information where appropriate; and
- If the posting is the result of a negative experience, consider rectifying the situation and/or act upon a reasonable solution.



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- When posting is a question, publicly acknowledge and send RRC web link where applicable. Message the individual to further address question and provide the [publicassist@rrc.texas.gov](mailto:publicassist@rrc.texas.gov) email address.
- When in doubt, consult with Communications Director prior to issuing a response.

Other considerations responding to comments include:

- Transparency – disclose your position at RRC to demonstrate credibility;
- Sourcing – cite your sources by including hyperlinks, video, images, or other references;
- Timeliness – take time to create good responses;
- Tone – respond in a tone that reflects highly on the mission of the RRC; and
- Influence – focus on the most used sites related to the RRC.

### Copyright Law

RRC social media staff must abide by laws governing copyright and fair use of copyrighted material owned by others. Never reprint whole articles or publications without first receiving written permission from the publication owner. Never quote more than a short excerpt of someone else's work and, if possible, provide a link to the original.

### Guidelines for Other Employees' Personal Use

Employees have a right to participate in social media networks outside the workplace using a personal email address and/or social media account. All employees are advised to use good judgment while interacting on social media. Employees are not allowed to disclose confidential agency information and/or matters that are privileged by law. Employees should not represent themselves as presenting the official agency position on any matter.

### Guidelines for Social Media Audiences

#### Privacy Notification

Posts and comments on social media accounts operated by the RRC are public and may be viewed by all visitors to pages maintained by RRC. Therefore, visitors should be careful about posting any private or personally identifiable information and limit releasing such information. Postings on RRC social media channels that include sensitive personal information are subject to removal, unless the subject of the information has given express consent for the disclosure of that information.

#### Linking Notification

From time to time, RRC may post links to third-party websites or social media channels. Such links do not constitute or imply agency endorsement of those sites, their content, or products and services associated with those sites.



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### **Third-Party Websites**

The social media tools employed by the RRC are hosted by third parties, and the use of those sites is governed by the social media providers' own policies, such as their respective privacy policies and terms of service.

### **Records Retention**

Communications (messages, posts, photographs, videos, and other formats) submitted or received using social media tools are considered public records and are subject to State Records and RRC retention requirements.