



Policy: Communications (E-mail Instant Messaging and Telephone)

Adopted: M2007-0143

Effective: 10/1/2007

Revised: 12/7/2021

Purpose

Electronic mail (email), Instant Messaging, and telephone systems are powerful business tools that provide great communication internally among employees and externally with the public. All employees have an e-mail account. Not all employees are required to use Instant Messaging and telephone as part of their essential job duties. These guidelines are established to ensure proper and ethical use of communication tools.

Definitions

Electronic Mail (e-mail): the system for sending messages electronically.

Instant Messaging: A facility for exchanging messages in real-time with other people over the Internet and tracking the progress of a given conversation.

Telephone: A generic term used to describe any telephone system that uses centralized stored program computer technology to provide switched telephone networking features and services. CTSs are referred to commercially, by such terms, as: computerized private branch exchange (CPBX); private branch exchange (PBX); private automatic branch exchange (PABX); electronic private automatic branch exchange (EABX); computerized branch exchange (CBX); computerized key telephone systems (CKTS); hybrid key systems; business communications systems; and office communications systems.

Policy

E-Mail, Instant Messaging, voice mail and the contents of the employees' mailboxes are the sole property of the employer. Security of email, instant messaging, and voice mail communications is not guaranteed. The City of Northfield reserves the right to override individual passwords and codes and may require employees to disclose all passwords and codes to facilitate such access.

Employees using the City's e-mail, instant messaging, and voice mail system knowingly and voluntarily consent to being monitored and acknowledge the employer's right to conduct such monitoring. Employees, during new employee orientation, will sign an acknowledgement and consent to such monitoring.

Unless there is a legitimate business purpose, the City will not access any employee's e-mail, instant messaging, or voice mail messages without the consent of either the originator or the recipient. Some examples of legitimate business purposes:

- determine if information which is disruptive and/or inappropriate to the organization is being transmitted;
- reasonable suspicion that City property is being used for purposes which are inappropriate to the workplace, in violation of City policy, or are unlawful;
- determine if employee's service delivery and effectiveness with internal and external customers is inappropriate;
- investigate conduct or behavior that may adversely affect the City or the welfare of the employees.
- determine excessive personal use of the City's computer system,



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Users may not eavesdrop or view other users' e-mail or voice mail messages without explicit permission.

Stored e-mail, instant messaging, and voice mail is subject to government data practices statutes, which make the text or message accessible to the public.

E-mail, instant messaging, and telephone are to be used for business purposes. While personal e-mail is permitted, it is to be kept to a minimum.

E-mail messages sent externally could be interpreted as stating the City of Northfield's position, policy, or viewpoint. Employees sending messages stating a position, policy or viewpoint must consider the necessity of such message and get guidance from their supervisor.

No one may solicit, promote or advertise any organizations, products or services through the use of e-mail, instant messaging or telephone anywhere else on City premises during working hours.

Employees are prohibited from all communications that may constitute verbal abuse, slander, defamation, or disparagement of employees, customers, clients, vendors, contractors, or others.

E-mails and Instant messaging that include chain e-mail and e-mails that solicit donations, , tell jokes, or contain political commentary or religious content are not allowed. Remember, anything you would not post on the walls of the break room should not be posted on the City's e-mail or instant messaging system.

The City of Northfield prohibits offensive, harassing, vulgar, obscene, or threatening communications, including disparagement of others based on race, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability, pregnancy, religious or political beliefs, or any other characteristic protected under federal, state, or local law.

Employees are prohibited from creating, distributing, or soliciting sexually oriented messages or images, unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature.

Distribution or printing of copyrighted materials, including articles and software, in violation of copyright laws, is prohibited.

Willful or Careless

We reserve the right to determine when an employee is sending excessive or improper e-mail, instant messaging, and voice mail. Willful or careless misuse of these tools will result in discipline up to and including discharge.

The willful or careless attempts to hide the identity of the sender, or represent the sender as someone else or from another organization, will result in discipline up to and



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including discharge.

The introduction of programs known as computer viruses, Trojan Horses and worms into the City's network or into any external networks or computers can cause excessive computer usage or damage a system. Such willful or careless introduction of computer viruses will result in discipline up to and including discharge.

Confidential

Employees should use the same care when creating electronic communications as they would use with oral or other written communications. Existing policies governing employee behavior, both within the workplace and when interacting with the general public, apply to all electronic communications.

Confidential information and some communications may be privileged (for example, communications between employee and attorney) and should be clearly identified as such. Exercise discretion when sending confidential information as the receiving party has the ability to forward the message anywhere in the world.

E-mails deleted are recoverable from the hard drive. E-mail and voice mail can be used in litigation and subpoenaed in court.

Password Security

The password feature of the City's network and telecommunications systems is the foundation for maintaining the confidentiality of the City's communication system. Passwords may not be disseminated to the public or to other employees. Passwords must be retained as confidential information by the user.

Employees are responsible for all electronic messages originating from a computer operating under his/her password.

Monitored

E-mail, instant messaging and voice mail are not the sole property of the person generating or receiving it. It is the property of the City. The City has the right and capability to monitor e-mail and voice mail by each user on our system. They can be monitored daily by the IT staff or appropriate consultant. The City Administrator and the Human Resources Director in conjunction can order an investigation of e-mail. In addition, e-mail and voice mail can be subpoenaed in court.

Violation

Any unintentional or deliberate violation of this policy by a City employee will be cause for appropriate disciplinary action up to and including discharge.