



# Charles County Unified Code of Conduct



Approved: Andrew Spalding, Chief 
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## I. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish a Code of Conduct aimed at ensuring that members of the Department maintain the highest level of integrity and ethical conduct both on and off duty. The nature of firefighting and emergency services work places all members in a position of public trust and subject to public scrutiny, and thus requires a level of conduct that is beyond reproach, regardless of work status or location. Thus, it is important that all members strive to achieve the highest level of ethical and professional conduct necessary to maintain the integrity of individual members and the Department as a whole.

All members of the Department must effectively work as a team to protect their own safety and the safety of their co-workers, and to provide effective firefighting and emergency services to the public. Failure to adhere to a certain level of conduct undermines the public's confidence in individual members and the Department as a whole.

## II. Definitions

1. Members – any person who is a member of a Charles County Volunteer Fire and/or Emergency Medical Services department or is an employee of the Charles County Department of Emergency Services
2. Department - An established Charles County Volunteer Fire and/or Emergency Medical Services department and the Charles County Department of Emergency Services.

## III. Applicability

1. This SOP applies to all members as defined above.
2. This policy defines the minimum acceptable Code of Conduct for members and supplements, but does not supersede, more stringent provisions included in individual Volunteer Station rules, regulations, or policies.



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## IV.

### General

1. The Department is committed to providing effective emergency services to the citizens and visitors of Charles County. The Department relies on the pride of its members as emergency services providers, their loyalty to the profession, the Department, and fellow members, and their dedication to providing outstanding professional services to the community. The Department can only succeed in its mission if its individual members maintain their personal integrity. The cornerstone of the Department is its relationship with the community it serves.
2. Each member is responsible for his or her actions and the effective interaction with other members to make an effective and cohesive team. Conduct that does not adhere to appropriate standards for the emergency services professions impugns the integrity of individual members, which, in turn, reflects on the Department as a whole, and impacts the Department's ability to serve the public.
3. All members are expected to comply with established Departmental rules and regulations, policies and procedures. DES employees are also expected to comply with the Charles County Code, County Policies and Procedures, and the Charles County Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual as applicable. In adopting a Code of Conduct, the Department intends to further clarify what constitutes both acceptable and unacceptable conduct, with the goal of promoting positive conduct and preventing conduct that undermines the integrity of the Department and its members.
4. This policy applies to a member's conduct as a whole; this includes a member who is on-duty and may be applicable to a member who is off-duty if the member's conduct has a connection to the member's official duties. This policy is applicable regardless if the misconduct occurs in-person or through some other means, such as social media.
5. The performance of the Department depends on each member's character, motivation, loyalty to the emergency service profession, self-discipline, adherence to the chain of command, obedience to orders, appropriate action in the absence of a specific order, and orderly interaction with other members of the Department in order to accomplish a common objective. The Department expects that every member will exercise a high level of self-discipline to enable the Department to meet this goal.
6. At times, members of the Department may violate applicable rules and regulations or engage in conduct that brings disrepute on individual members or the Department as a whole. A Code of Conduct is necessary not only to set minimum standards of conduct the Department expects of its members, but also to alert members to the possibility of disciplinary action for failure to adhere to specified minimum standards of conduct and professionalism.

## I.

### Fundamental Expectations

1. The Department has certain fundamental expectations of its members. These fundamental expectations do not themselves constitute specific rules of conduct,



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and accordingly, are not the basis for disciplinary action. Instead, the Department hopes every member will strive to demonstrate these characteristics that are consistent with the highest level of professionalism and personal integrity.

- **Selflessness and dedication** – the commitment of oneself to one's community is the foundation of the firefighting and emergency services professions and the volunteer corporations. Selflessness exists in the dedication and actions of firefighters and emergency services personnel to ensuring the health, safety, and welfare of their fellow members and the community.
- **Loyalty** – The Department expects that every member will be loyal to the principles that underlie the emergency services professions, to their fellow members, the commitment of service to others, the mission of the Department, and the oath of office.
- **Duty** – All members are expected to use their training and experience to protect the public, their fellow members, and themselves and to faithfully and diligently carry out their assigned tasks, to adhere to the chain of command, and to meet the requirements of their respective positions and applicable licensing or certification standards. Anything less violates the trust placed in the Department by the community. All members are expected to perform assigned tasks throughout their full tours of duty.
- **Judgement** – Each member of the Department is responsible for the appropriate exercise of judgment commensurate with the member's rank, responsibility, and assigned job tasks, after carefully considering the guidance offered by applicable laws, policies and procedures, and professional standards.
- **Demeanor and Bearing** – The public's perception of and trust in the Department greatly depend on the actions, appearance, and attitudes of its individual members. All members are expected to present themselves in a professional manner designed to promote and maintain the integrity of the Department and its members and the public confidence in the Department.
- **Role of Supervisors** – The Department expects Supervisors and command staff to demonstrate conduct that exemplifies the highest professional and ethical standards. Officers must be leaders and are expected to use their training, experience, and judgment to motivate, manage, and direct subordinate members to perform their duties and to work as a cohesive team in carrying out the Department's mission, even when forced to make decisions that are unpopular or difficult. Supervisors and command staff must be accountable not only for themselves, but also for the conduct and performance of the individuals they supervise.

## II.

### Rules of Conduct

1. The Department has established these specific rules of conduct for its members that go beyond Departmental expectations. These rules are not intended to be an exclusive list and violations of these rules of conduct may be used as the basis for disciplinary action.
2. The System has established these specific rules of conduct for its members that go beyond basic expectations. These rules are not intended to be an exclusive list and violations of these rules of conduct may be used as the basis for disciplinary action.
  - a. Compliance with Policy



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- Members shall not commit any act or fail to commit any act that would constitute a violation of Departmental policy.
- This may include but is not limited to: Department Standard Operating Procedures, General Orders, Special Orders, memoranda, directives, This also includes the Charles County Personnel Policy and Procedures Manual for DES employees.
- In accordance with the Code of Conduct, all DES Employees are expected to comply with the Drugs and Alcohol Testing Policy.
- The presence of illegal drugs is prohibited inside Department Buildings.
- Alcohol is not permitted inside Department Buildings unless authorized by the Station Chief or Chief Officer designee during Department sanctioned events.
- Firearms (with the exception of sworn law enforcement officers) are prohibited inside Department Buildings.
- b. Compliance with Laws
  - Members shall obey all local, State, and federal laws and the laws of any foreign country they visit.
  - Any member who is arrested or charged with a criminal violation or a serious traffic violation as described in section 26-202 of the Maryland Transportation Code or learns that he or she is the subject of a criminal investigation must notify the Department immediately.
  - A misdemeanor or felony conviction, guilty plea, or finding of guilt shall be assumed to be an admission of a violation of this section.
  - From an employment perspective, the Department may take appropriate disciplinary action against its employees regardless of pending criminal actions, charges, or citations.
- c. Performance
  - While on duty, members shall not engage in activities that cause them to neglect or be inattentive to their assigned duties.
  - While on duty, members shall at all times remain available and in a sufficient and appropriate stage of readiness to quickly respond to any situation requiring performance of their assigned duties and responsibilities of their positions.
  - DES employees may not leave their duty posts without the approval of their supervisor.
  - Members shall maintain competency and fitness sufficient to perform their assigned duties and responsibilities associated with their positions as established by their Department.
  - Failure to maintain or renew required licenses and/or certifications associated with the member's rank, grade, or position.
- d. Discrimination, Threats, and/or Harassment
  - The Department has "zero tolerance" for any form of discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, or threats in the workplace.
  - Members shall not threaten, verbally or physically assault, strike, or harass any member of the Department, County employee, or member of the public.
  - As required by federal, State, and/or County law, members shall not discriminate against nor harass any citizen or member in a protected class, including, but not



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limited to: on the basis of race, age, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity.

- A member shall not engage in retaliatory conduct against any member of the Department or public who reports alleged violations of Departmental policies and procedures, who participates in any investigation of an alleged violation, or who reports discriminatory practices or participates in an investigation of such practices.
- e. Insubordination
  - Members may not intentionally engage in conduct, through actions or words, which are disrespectful to, or that otherwise undermines the authority of, a supervisor the chain of command.
  - Members shall comply with the chain of command and shall obey any lawful order of a superior or a person authorized to be in command.
    - If a member is given an order that conflicts with an existing order, the member shall notify the superior giving the latter order. If that order is repeated, it will stand.
    - They shall not obey any order, which they reasonably believe to be immoral, unsafe, or illegal.
- f. Conduct Unbecoming
  - A member shall not engage in conduct that is unbecoming to the member, the Department, the County, or the profession.
  - Conduct unbecoming includes any conduct that would bring the County, Department, or member into disrepute or dishonor; or would disgrace the integrity of the profession; or undermine public trust; or would be detrimental to the operation and efficiency of the Department.
- g. Honesty
  - Members shall not intentionally or willfully make any false statement, either verbal or written, or withhold material information associated with the members' position, official duties, or the Department's official business.
  - Members shall not lie, steal, cheat, or make intentionally deceptive statements associated with the members' position, official duties, or the Department's official business.
  - Members shall not knowingly enter or cause to be entered any inaccurate or false information into an official record of the Department.
- h. Member Relationships
  - Personal relationships between members shall not interfere with the performance of a member's duties.
  - DES Supervisors may not have romantic or sexual relationships with members in their direct chain of command and shall be responsible for alerting the appropriate Division Chief to determine whether reassignment is required.
  - DES Employees must comply with the Personnel Policy Manual Page 7-4 Employment of Relatives.
  - Members may not engage in sexual acts or conduct while on duty or on Department property.



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- i. Abuse of Position
  - Members shall not use their positions as members of the Department and/or as County employees for personal gain for themselves or others or to obtain for themselves or others some benefit not available to the general public.
  - This includes but is not limited to: the use of Departmental identification cards, badges, uniforms, insignia, or equipment.
  - Members shall not lend their identification cards or badges to anyone, nor allow them to be reproduced without Departmental approval.
  - Members may not use their position with the Department or Charles County, including Departmental title, identification cards, badges, uniforms, insignia, or equipment, in connection with an appearance, public statement, endorsement, advertisement, or testimonial without the Station Chief or DES Director or Department's written permission, which ever is appropriate.
  - No part of the Departmental uniform, badge, logo, identification card, insignia, or equipment shall be used in a way that brings disrepute on an employee or the Department.
- j. Confidentiality of Information
  - Members shall not disclose or disseminate any information, including pictures and/or video, obtained or retained by the Department or pursuant to the members' official duties that is confidential and not generally available to the public, except as authorized by the Department.
  - Members shall not use their authority to obtain information that would not be obtainable by the public, unless necessary to carry out the official business of the Department and/or the job duties of members.
- k. Public Statements and Appearances
  - Members shall not hold themselves out as speaking on behalf of the Department or the County unless authorized to do so.
- l. Courtesy
  - Members of the Department shall treat members of the public, County employees, and other Department members with the respect and courtesy expected in a professional environment.
  - No member, in the performance of his or her duties, shall address another individual in a way that can reasonably be interpreted as violent, derogatory, or discriminatory.
- m. Social Media
  - These requirements apply for personal and public use of social media.
  - The following guidelines apply to member use of "electronic social media", regardless of where the sites are accessed. For the purposes of this policy "electronic social media" includes, but is not limited to, online tools used to share content such as personal web pages, blogs, photos, message boards, and social networking sites. Examples of such activity include Facebook, Instagram, Google+, Flickr, Twitter, LinkedIn, Tumblr, Pinterest, You Tube, and Web blogs. Social media is constantly evolving, so the fact that something is not included in this list does not mean that it is not covered by this policy.
  - All policies (including harassment, discrimination, and workplace violence) apply to



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personal use of electronic social media.

- Members may not use social media to disclose confidential information. Sharing such information without proper consent can cause serious damage to persons and businesses and can result in legal action and penalties against persons who improperly disclose information.
- If posting photos, videos, or recordings that contain images or information about emergency response make sure there is no confidential information visible in the posting. This includes customer data, computer screens, meeting presentations, product designs, accident scenes including persons involved in emergency calls and similar information.
- DES Employees should never post pictures, videos, or recordings of others taken during the course of their employment on personal social media sites.
- Members may not create the impression that they are speaking on behalf of Charles County Government, Emergency Services, nor member Companies when using electronic social media.
- Be respectful of the Member Companies, Emergency Services, the County, our customers, and associated organizations. Do not make comments intended to harm the County or Department's business relationships or to injure the members or County employees. It's also important that you be accurate in what you post.
- Members should have no expectation of privacy when using County or Department computers, servers, or other technology. The County and the Department reserves the right to monitor use of electronic social media on its equipment.
- Members are personally responsible and personally liable for their social media posts. As a result, it is their responsibility to be aware of applicable laws, including, but not limited to, laws regarding defamation, harassment, retaliation, obscenity, trade secrets, copyright and invasion of privacy. The County, nor member department, is not responsible or liable for any losses or damages caused by member postings.
- If a member's personal media site(s) in any way lists or depicts them as of a member department or a County employee then that member's social media posts or actions will be held to the standards above.

# Unified Code of Conduct - June 2021

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