

TO: ALL COUNTY PERSONNEL

**FROM: VERDENIA C. BAKER
COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR**

PREPARED BY: INFORMATION SYSTEMS SERVICES (ISS)

SUBJECT: INTERNET USE POLICY

PPM#: CW-R-008

ISSUE DATE
June 14, 2024

EFFECTIVE DATE
June 14, 2024

PURPOSE:

To establish a policy for the appropriate use of the Internet as a resource for County agencies and departments.

UPDATES:

Future updates to this PPM are the responsibility of the Chief Information Officer (CIO).

AUTHORITY:

- Florida Statutes (F.S.), Chapter 934, as may be amended
- Palm Beach County Merit Rules No. 7; Rules of Conduct; Disciplinary Guidelines; Adverse Actions; Employee Recourse, as may be amended

SCOPE:

This policy is applicable to all Internet services, including but not limited to, use of the Internet, e-mail, file transfer, remote computer access, news services, social networking, instant messaging, blogs, wikis, and video and other file sharing sites. This policy applies whether the Internet use is from County facilities or from remote locations.

This policy applies to all employees using computers or Internet connections supplied by Palm Beach County, from any location during working and non-working hours. The policy also applies to contactors and volunteers who are authorized to use County-owned equipment and facilities to access the Internet.

Additional policies regarding email and social media usage are provided in countywide PPMs CW-R-006 (“The Use, Retention, and Destruction of Electronic Mail (E-mail)”) and CW-R-013

("Social Media Policy"), respectively.

BACKGROUND:

The Internet serves as a vast source of information and has evolved into an indispensable communications and business tool. Internet connectivity is critical to County agencies as well as members of the public who wish to conduct business with Palm Beach County and obtain information about local government issues, projects and services. Governmental organizations commonly rely upon the Internet for improvement in productivity, to improve the quality of services, provide open access to public records, and conduct business transactions with the public. Conversely, unrestricted use of the Internet has the potential to adversely affect, rather than enhance, employee productivity.

POLICY:

Overview

The Internet is to be used in a responsible, efficient, ethical, and legal manner, consistent with the County Merit Rules, in the support of Palm Beach County government programs. Accessing inappropriate web sites and activities that would reflect unfavorably on the County and its various organizations, employees and citizens is strictly prohibited.

This policy addresses those specific authorized and restricted uses of the Internet when utilizing County-provided equipment. **Failure to adhere to this policy and administrative procedures shall result in suspension or revocation of Internet access. Willful or intentional misuse will lead to disciplinary action under applicable provisions of the Palm Beach County Merit Rules.**

Unacceptable Activities

County employees are specifically prohibited from accessing the Internet for the following activities:

1. Creating, downloading, viewing, storing, copying, or transmitting sexually explicit/oriented, hate oriented, threatening or illegal information, including discriminatory and offensive jokes or cartoons.
2. Gambling.
3. Promoting or endorsing outside business ventures or profit-making ventures (e.g., operating a business or pursuing non-County employment activities with Palm Beach County's computers or Internet resources). This includes any compensated, outside employment.
4. Interfering with legitimate access to government, commercial, or other networks or systems.

5. Unauthorized destruction or corruption of governmental, commercial, or other data or resources.
6. Unauthorized sharing of government or commercial information or software not authorized for disclosure or use by others, to include peer-to-peer file sharing.
7. Use that could generate or result in an unauthorized charge or expense to the County, including use of County email to register for accounts to utilize “free” online services.
8. Activities that consume excessive resources, such as:
 - downloading streaming video or audio files for amusement or entertainment purposes;
 - creating or transmitting personal mass mailings or spam; or
 - downloading or sending large personal files via e-mail.
9. Use of County e-mail addresses in a manner that may give the false impression that an individual’s otherwise personal communication is authorized by or represents the opinion of the County. This includes use of an individual’s title or the name of a County department when using a social networking site, blog, wiki, video or other file sharing site, or other Web site or Web service for personal reasons. A possible disclaimer statement might be as follows: *The following message or information is personal and does not reflect any official or unofficial position of Palm Beach County government.*

Additional information on social media usage as it relates to this issue is provided in countywide PPM CW-R-013 (“Social Media Policy”).
10. Engaging in any activity that would bring disrepute to the County or violate County policy or any local or State statute or regulation.

The preceding examples of prohibited Internet usage may not be all encompassing.

Acceptable Uses for Non-Business Purposes

Limited use of the Internet for non-business purposes may be permitted in accordance with individual department policies. Any usage of the Internet for non-business purposes must conform to the following requirements:

1. Use does not include any of the unacceptable activities listed herein.
2. Use occurs within the employees’ personal time (i.e. lunch break, scheduled break periods, before and after work, weekends) or flex-time.
3. Use is restricted and scheduled so as not to infringe upon the employees’ duties and work productivity.

Examples of permissible use for non-business purposes include: personal correspondence, monitoring of the deferred compensation program, training, education, obtaining news, traffic and weather information, and general research.

Security

County employees must be aware of the security threats posed by use of the Internet. Security threats may be introduced to the Palm Beach County network and computing environment by sending or receiving information through the Internet. Threats can be in the form of phishing attacks (official looking emails designed to entice a user to click on a link to enter personal or County-related information) after which malware will be surreptitiously installed on the user's device, viruses (embedded in documents or downloaded software) that are designed to corrupt data bases, and/or direct attack by hackers with the intent of accessing sensitive information or disrupting the operations of the County.

A secure firewall will be administered by ISS to protect against the threat of outside intruders who may be attempting to gain unauthorized access to County systems and data. ISS will also maintain licenses for the County's standardized anti-malware screening software to be placed on all computers (regardless of Internet access).

Files containing sensitive or confidential County data, as defined by existing security policies, must be encrypted if these files are transmitted through the Internet. Each agency sending data over the Internet is responsible for determining whether encryption is appropriate. **Confidential files sent over the Internet as attachments should be encrypted using an application meeting the Federal Information Protection Standard AES-256.**

Privacy

All Palm Beach County computer systems are subject to monitoring at all times to assure proper functioning of the systems, to provide security for the computer system's operation and the information contained therein, to prevent unauthorized use, and to deter and investigate violations of law. **There is no reasonable expectation of privacy in the use of the Palm Beach County computer systems, however, any contents deemed personal are protected in accordance with the 'Acceptable Uses for Non-Business Purposes' section of this document.**

RESPONSIBILITIES:

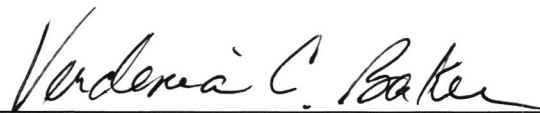
Primary responsibilities relating to Internet access and use are outlined below.

ISS:

1. Present recommendations to County Administration regarding the County policy on Internet activity.
2. Provide Internet access.
3. Where feasible, block access to unacceptable web sites.
4. Administer the Internet security function including firewalls and anti-malware protection.

User Departments and Agencies:

1. Where deemed necessary, establish departmental policy on non-business use of the Internet.
2. Assure that subordinate employees understand and comply with policies governing internet use in accordance with this PPM and any specific departmental policies.
3. Take positive corrective action upon substantiation of a policy violation.



VERDENIA C. BAKER
COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Supersession History:

1. PPM # CW-R-008, effective 4/1/2000
2. PPM # CW-R-008, effective 1/22/2004
3. PPM # CW-R-008, effective 8/2/2010
4. PPM # CW-R-008, effective 9/21/2016