

# Guidelines: Firefighter Photography, Video and Social Media Use

## Fire Operations Group, May 2011

- We're in a new era of media. The word "media" used to mean the news/broadcast industry and what came out of Hollywood. Not anymore. Almost anyone in the fire organization now has the capability to shoot video or photographs and post them within minutes. Social media enables firefighters to express a thought or opinion almost at any time from any location.
- The capability can be positive for the fire and aviation community. For example, new technologies can be used to provide documentation for accidents or provide helpful information to investigation or review teams. The new technologies can provide great images for sharing with family, friends or even national audiences.
- Yet we've seen some instances of video or photographs in unsafe, unprofessional or embarrassing circumstances. When that happens, it reflects poorly on the entire fire and aviation community.
- Agency managers and supervisors don't want to police video and photo postings. We'd rather approach it in terms of "doing what's right," and allow employees to use their own judgment about what is appropriate and what is not.
- Posting an inappropriate video, photo or blog comment could have unwanted effects.
  - » It may be unsafe to shoot photos or video. A firefighter who is concentrating on a camera can't be looking up, looking down, and looking all around.
  - » It could direct unwanted attention to individuals and crews that may lead to disciplinary actions. It also could mean that disciplinary decisions are taken away from local supervisors and assigned to people elsewhere in the organization.
  - » Once a video goes viral, not much can be done to pull it. An unprofessional or unsafe activity will have a shelf life of years.



- » No one benefits when the fire service is perceived as unprofessional.
- » The long-term effects of posting a video or photo may damage careers. The person you may be hurting most is yourself or a crew member.
- » Posting video or photos that depict unsafe or unprofessional behavior is a serious breach of ethics. The content might have been the result of a simple mistake, a lapse in thought, a moment of bad judgment. But it's a conscious decision to post unflattering images. In that sense, posting them could be viewed as a more serious lapse of ethics and judgment than the activity portrayed in the video or photo.
- » We all make mistakes. Is it fair to have a crew member's mistake in the public realm for years to come?



- NIFC has a photo library and we've been approved to post to the government YouTube site. Firefighters are welcome to send their images to NIFC external affairs for posting. There are other sanctioned places to post appropriate images without damaging your reputation or the credibility of the fire and aviation community.
- Supervisors need to emphasize the importance of appropriate behavior within the fire community. Take advantage of pre-season meetings, refresher training, tailgate safety sessions, and other opportunities to remind fire personnel of their responsibility to represent the fire and aviation community in a professional light, at all times and in all ways. Teach and remind, and then teach and remind some more as the season goes on.
- To date, problems in this area have been minimal for the agencies. Let's continue the good work and keep up our professional judgment to ensure it stays that way.

