



**United States Coast Guard**  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

# **ALCOAST 350/17 - NOV 2017**

## **COAST GUARD SOCIAL MEDIA**

### **PERSONAL USE GUIDANCE**

U.S. Coast Guard sent this bulletin at 11/27/2017 12:22 PM EST R 271216 NOV 17  
FM COMDT COGARD WASHINGTON DC//CG-092//  
SUBJ: COAST GUARD SOCIAL MEDIA PERSONAL USE GUIDANCE  
A. COAST GUARD SOCIAL MEDIA HANDBOOK, v 2015  
B. COAST GUARD EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MANUAL, COMDTINST M5700.13 (SERIES)

1. This guidance is provided to ensure Coast Guard members are aware of their responsibilities and obligations when making social media posts. It applies to active duty and reserve Coast Guard members making unofficial or personal internet posts.

#### 2. DEFINITIONS:

A. "Unofficial Internet posts" refer to any content about the Coast Guard or related to the Coast Guard that are posted on any Internet site by Coast Guard members while not performing an official duty. Unofficial Internet posts are not initiated by any part of the Coast Guard or reviewed through any official Coast Guard approval process, and do not involve content released in an official capacity by Coast Guard public affairs staff, Coast Guard Community Services marketing directors, or commanders designated as releasing authorities.

B. "Personal Internet posts" include any content posted in a non-duty status or role that are not related to the Coast Guard. These posts include, but are not limited to, personal comments, photographs, video, and graphics. Internet sites include social networking sites, blogs, forums, photo and video-sharing sites, and other sites to include sites not owned, operated or controlled by the Coast Guard, Department of Homeland Security or the Department of Defense.

#### 3. GUIDELINES:

A. Since many members disclose their Coast Guard affiliation on their personal social network profiles, members' personal and professional lives often blur in the online space. All content posted on social media should be considered public material. There is no private communication on social media and everything can be shared.

B. Coast Guard members must be acutely aware that they lose control over content they post on the Internet and that many social media sites have policies that give these sites ownership of all content and information posted or stored on those systems. Coast Guard members should always use their best judgment and anticipate how the content of their posts will reflect upon themselves, their unit, and the Coast Guard.

C. IAW REFs (A) and (B), Coast Guard members are encouraged to responsibly engage in unofficial Internet posts about the Coast Guard and Coast Guard-related topics. The Coast Guard performs a valuable service around the world every day and Coast Guard members are often in the best position to share the Coast Guard's story. However, Coast Guard members are personally responsible for all content they publish on social networking sites, blogs, or other websites, including unofficial and personal Internet posts.

D. Coast Guard members who communicate online about the Coast Guard in unofficial Internet posts may identify themselves as Coast Guard members, to include their rank, military component (e.g., CAPT. John Smith, USCG), and status (active or reserve) if desired. However, if Coast Guard members decide not to identify themselves as a member of the Coast Guard, they should not disguise, impersonate or otherwise misrepresent their identity or affiliation with the Coast Guard. When expressing personal opinions, Coast Guard members should make clear that they are speaking for themselves and not on behalf of the Coast Guard and use a disclaimer such as: "the postings on this site are my own and don't represent Coast Guard positions or opinions."

E. Coast Guard members must never engage in commentary or publish content on social networking platforms or through other forms of communication that harms good order and discipline or brings discredit upon themselves, their unit, or the Coast Guard. Members must always think twice before engaging in questionable online activities, and must avoid actions online that threaten the morale, operational readiness and security, or public standing of their units, or that compromise our core values. Do not post classified, controlled unclassified information (CUI), sensitive information, or comments or content which is defaming, threatening, harassing or which discriminates based on a person's race, color, sex, gender, age, religion, national origin, sexual orientation or other protected criteria. Do not post lewd or indecent comments or profanity. These types of activities, can embarrass the Coast Guard, harm our reputation and may violate state or Federal laws, expose Service members to civil liability and subject Coast Guard members to disciplinary action under the punitive articles of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ).

#### 4. RESOURCES:

A. Coast Guard members who believe they have been subjected to inappropriate online conduct are encouraged to report incidents to their Chain of Command, Coast Guard Investigative Services, their servicing Coast Guard legal office, Local Law Enforcement, Inspector General, Equal Opportunity Advisors, Behavioral Health Counselors or Military OneSource.

B. Members who feel they have been subjected to inappropriate online behavior related to sexual harassment and would like to maintain privacy are encouraged to report incidents to their chaplain, a local Sexual Assault Response Coordinator or Victim Advocates. Additionally, the DoD Safe Helpline provides confidential, live, one-on-one help and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. DoD Safe Helpline can be reached by phone, 1-877-995-5247, by text at 55-247 (inside the U.S.) or 001-202-470-5546 (outside the U.S.) or through online chat at [www.safehelpline.org](http://www.safehelpline.org). Coast Guard members who have witnessed prohibited conduct should report incidents to their Chain of Command.

C. For answers to social media questions, Coast Guard members should contact their local public affairs office. Service-wide guidance, support and questions can be directed to the headquarters social media office at [socialmedia@uscg.mil](mailto:socialmedia@uscg.mil).

5. RADM Peter W. Gautier, Director of Governmental and Public Affairs, sends.

6. Internet release authorized.