

# **Internet and E-mail Acceptable Use Policy**

## **Lincoln County, North Carolina**

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Dante' G. Patterson, Management Information Systems Director

### **Purpose**

This policy is intended to encourage responsible and acceptable use of the Internet services provided by Lincoln County, while continuing to support the needs of citizens and County employees. Any activity or actions that interfere with this purpose is prohibited. The policy reflects a realization that efficient utilization of the Internet for communications and research can:

- Enhance partnership, community involvement and the exchange of information and ideas between citizens, businesses and local government.
- Provide information both internally and to the public about the activities and services of the County.
- Improve the quality, productivity and general cost-effectiveness of the County's work force.

Since technology is constantly evolving, Lincoln County requires its employees to use a common sense approach to the rules set in this policy, complying not only with the letter, but also the spirit of this policy. This policy applies to all regular and contract County employees, volunteers and other affiliates who use County-provided Internet facilities.

### **Who will receive access**

A County Internet account is a resource granted to increase productivity and provide opportunities for professional growth. It must be used with these goals in mind. Improper use could result in the cancellation of a user's County Internet account and disciplinary action.

Individuals desiring Internet access must first obtain approval of their departments. In addition, users must obtain specific permission from their department heads for news group, list server or chat access. These services can generate large volumes of email that has to potential to flood the County mail server. In general, it is advised that department heads only approve access for employees who would need frequent use of the Internet as a routine part of their jobs.

A condition of authorization is that all County Internet users must read and sign a copy of this policy and return it to their department heads. Departments must keep a register of all their Internet users. When a County employee with an Internet account leaves County employ, the department must notify the Management Information Systems (MIS) Office immediately.

## **Responsibilities**

At all times when an employee is using Lincoln County technology resources, he or she is representing the County. Each user of a County-provided Internet account is responsible and accountable thereupon for the proper use of that account. All communication over assigned Lincoln County property must be legal, ethical, responsible and decent regardless of its origin.

All Internet users are expected to know the tools, rules and etiquette of the Internet, and behave accordingly.

## **Acceptable Use**

Since needs vary, it is up to each department to develop its own written policy for acceptable use of the Internet. At a minimum, those policies must incorporate the following, which apply to all persons using a County-provided Internet account. Those users:

- Are prohibited from using the County's Internet connections for private gain or profit.
- May not violate the privacy of others and must be sensitive to the fact that Internet news group postings, certain e-mail messages, Web sites and various other communications on the Internet are public.
- Are prohibited from using obscene, racist, political in nature or sexist language or images.
- May not interfere with or disrupt any County network or Internet users, services, programs or equipment. Disruptions include but are not limited to propagation of computer worms, viruses or other debilitating programs, bulk e-mails, emails with unauthorized attachments, and using the County network to make unauthorized entry to any other machine accessible via the network or Internet.

## **Legalities**

Employees must use the Internet in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations. This includes compliance with copyright and license laws covering programs, data and written material accessed, obtained or provided to others via the Internet.

The Internet provides easy access to software distributed by companies on a trial basis. The free access does not indicate that the software is free or that it may be distributed freely. Applicable software copyright laws and licensing agreements must be followed. In addition software may not be loaded onto any Lincoln County computer system, through any of the above methods, without the prior written approval of the MIS office. This includes shareware, freeware, personal software or Internet distributed programs.

Users must comply with all State and Federal laws and County policies and ordinances with regard to conflict of interest, solicitation, or violation of other worker's religious or political freedom.

Users may not transmit threatening, obscene, religious, politically oriented or harassing materials, nor engage in any form of sexual harassment. This rule applies to forwarding as well as originating such offensive material

Anytime information is transmitted through electronic media such as the Internet; there is the possibility that it could be intercepted. Therefore, no confidential Lincoln County information may be transmitted electronically without the prior approval of the County Manager or County Attorney. If the employee is uncertain whether information is confidential, err on the side of caution and obtain approval before transmitting.

Deliberate attempts to degrade or disrupt system performance will be viewed as criminal activity under applicable state and federal law.

### **Security, viruses and downloading**

County employees will not share with others their assigned Internet passwords, access codes or other authentication devices. They must not be written down and stored, posted anywhere, programmed into a macro or stored on the computer system. All Internet passwords, access codes or other authentication devices must be changed regularly.

Employees will ensure that whenever a technology resource assigned to them is not being used, it will be secured to avoid use by unauthorized personnel. Employees will log off all County systems prior to departing for the day and prior to leaving for the weekend.

Except as provided elsewhere in this policy, the examination, modification, copying, or deletion of files and/or data belonging to other employees without their consent is prohibited.

Staff members whose PCs are enabled to accept files via the Internet (e.g., via FTP, email attachments or news groups) are individually and directly responsible for checking them for viruses using the latest version of a reliable virus-checking program. Departments shall report all virus outbreaks to MIS.

### **Internet e-mail**

Lincoln County recognizes the fact that the use of e-mail for incidental purposes is not likely to strain County resources. However, personal communications should not be excessive or interfere with job performance. The employee should reimburse any and all fees incurred from the personal use of equipment.

The use of e-mail passwords does not imply privacy or confidentiality. Electronic mail (both internal and via the Internet) is considered to be a public record and may be

subject to public disclosure or inspection from County officials in accordance with Public Records Law. Routine backup of electronic mail will occur as part of the system maintenance performed by MIS.

When sending or forwarding E-mail, either internally or externally, all employees shall identify themselves clearly and accurately. Anonymous or pseudonymous posting is expressly forbidden.

Electronic messages should not be intercepted or tampered with by individual users, nor should messages be encrypted or encoded.

### **Web pages**

In order to maintain a consistent, quality presence on the Internet, MIS has established procedures that will assist departments in creating and publishing information on this medium. County departments interested in developing content for the Internet/World Wide Web must coordinate and receive approval from MIS before information will be made available on the Internet. No County department may create or contract for its own physical Web site without the approval of the County Manager and the MIS Department.

Information published on the Internet should be written in a clear and concise manner and presented in a graphically appealing format. Useful links that make it easy for an individual to access information also contribute to the success of a Web page. Strategic use of audio, video, forms, databases and interactive segments can enhance the overall presentation and usefulness of material. Since the Internet is not always the most appropriate channel of communication for everyone, MIS is available to assist in determining the benefits and resources required for publishing information on the Internet. Once information is published, it is the ongoing responsibility of the corresponding department to ensure the timeliness and accuracy of the content of its Web pages. Significant changes to the content of web pages must receive approval from MIS before the information is published on the Internet. MIS will review all County-related Web pages on a periodic basis.

### **Disclaimers**

A wide variety of information exists on the Internet. Some persons may find part of that information to be offensive or otherwise objectionable. Employees should be aware that the County has no control over and can therefore not be responsible for the content of information on the Internet other than what we as an organization place there.

The County's Internet host computers are traceable to the County. Persons using County-provided Internet accounts should not assume they are provided any degree of anonymity. Outside users who want to identify machines associated with the County can do so easily.

Employees also must understand that e-mail messages and other transfer of information via the Internet are currently not secure. Persons desiring to send someone confidential or sensitive communications should not use the Internet.

**Enforcement**

MIS and department directors will review reported and perceived violations of this policy. Department heads will be responsible for the enforcement of the County's Internet policy. Department heads will take remedial action when their staffs do not adhere to the Internet policy.

Violations may result in disciplinary action, including termination or any other action deemed necessary under this policy governing misuse of County equipment or under the Lincoln County disciplinary policy.

**I have read this Internet policy, and in consideration of my being provided access to the County's technology resources, I agree to its terms as a condition of my use of a County-provided Internet account.**

Name (print) \_\_\_\_\_ Department \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_