

## KITSAP COUNTY ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

### I. Statement of Purpose

The primary purpose of Kitsap County's electronic communications systems is to facilitate the effective and efficient conduct of County business, which includes public safety activities. The communication systems are also provided to encourage and facilitate the free exchange of business-related communications, ideas, and information between employees, and providing, exchanging, and searching for information for county residents, businesses and other governmental agencies.

This policy applies to anyone using electronic communications systems owned by Kitsap County, and is intended to ensure that the use of electronic communications is consistent with County policies, all applicable laws, and the individual user's job responsibilities.

### II. Definitions.

- A. **Electronic Communications.** Electronic communications are defined to include, but are not limited to, telephones, voice mail, facsimile communications, electronic mail systems (e-mail), Internet, Intranet, and electronic media that generates, stores, transmits, receives and/or displays communications over Kitsap County-owned equipment.
- B. **Internet.** A worldwide collection of computers, ranging in size from palm organizers, to desktop computers, to the largest mainframes, all connected to one another via telecommunications systems. This web of computers offers information or computer software that can be downloaded onto the user's computer. The Internet represents global access.
- C. **E-mail.** Using a computer and the Internet, a user can compose a message, transmit, deliver it to someone, and have it delivered electronically.
- D. **Intranet.** Similar to the Internet in terms of computers and data connection links, and limited to internal/corporate accessibility.
- E. **Department Head.** Elected Official or Department Head.
- F. **User.** Anyone using electronic communications systems owned by Kitsap County.
- G. **Qualified Education Programs (QEP).** Education programs that receive institutional accreditation or specialized accreditation. The accrediting agency must be recognized as such by the U.S. Department of Education, Accrediting Agency Evaluation Branch or the Commission on Recognition of Post-secondary Accreditation (CORPA).

### **III. Electronic Communications are for Business Use.**

Electronic communications are a form of business communication. Except as described in Section VI of this policy, electronic communications may only be used in connection with matters that are reasonably related to County business, and in accordance with business decorum. Electronic communications may not be used for employee private benefit or gain or to support or advocate for non-County related business. The County reserves the right to monitor the use and content of all electronic communications.

### **IV. Electronic Communications are not private.**

Electronic communications are the property of Kitsap County. Electronic communications are not personal or private. Any message sent through voice mail or e-mail can be forwarded on to anyone else on the system. Even after deleting e-mail, it is possible to retrieve and read it. Telephone calls can be tracked; E-mail, Internet and Intranet activity can be tracked and monitored. Many electronic communications constitute public records. The County may monitor, read, use, and disclose electronic communications, user accounts, workstations, and file server space. A user's use of the County's electronic communications shall constitute consent to the County's monitoring, reading, using, and disclosing of any use by a user of the County's electronic communications system.

### **V. Electronic Communications Decorum and Content.**

Kitsap County is a public agency, and use of the County's electronic communications systems reflects upon the County. As a result, communications must be in accordance with business decorum, and appropriate to the County's business setting.

### **VI. Use of Electronic Communications.**

Kitsap County is obligated to conserve and protect County-owned resources for the benefit of the public interests, not private interests. When use of electronic communications furthers Kitsap County governmental operations, then such use does not violate the County's obligation to conserve and protect County resources.

An employee's use of electronic communications must be reasonable, responsible, and accountable. County employees may not use electronic communications for private benefit or gain of the employee or other person. This prohibition does not apply to the use of electronic communications to benefit another person as part of the employee's official duties.

A County employee may make occasional but limited use of County-owned resources only if:

- There is no cost to the County; and
- The use of County resources does not interfere with the performance of the employee's official duties; and
- The use is brief in duration and does not disrupt or distract from the conduct of County business due to volume or frequency; and

- The use does not compromise the security or integrity of County information or software; and
- The use promotes organizational effectiveness or enhances the job-related skills of a County employee.
- In those rare instances where there are costs, such as long distance phone charges or supply charges, the user will reimburse the county.

For examples of proper and improper use of electronic communications, refer to WAC 292-110-010.

Unless Information Services and the Department Head approve an exception, access to the Internet is allowed only via the County's centralized Internet connection. Department Heads determine which sites are appropriate.

Users may not use the e-mail to send a message to "All" (Go to Address Book, Select "All" option) except in the following circumstances:

- Public safety, when immediate notification is needed;
- Health and welfare, when immediate notification is needed;
- Computer, network, or telephone system disruptions; or
- Messages approved by Department Head.

Users may post community and County event announcements on the County's Intranet.

Department Heads approve Intranet and Internet content. Kitsap County may establish links to non-County sites that are non-partisan, non-profit and beneficial to the County.

## **VII. Misuse of Electronic Communications.**

The following are examples of unacceptable uses of electronic communications. The prohibition includes possession, use, transmission, or access to prohibited material. This list is not all-inclusive:

- Aliases - Use of an alias/another employee name while using e-mail, or sending anonymous messages, misrepresenting an employee's job, job title, job description, or position within the County.
- Audio/Video – Download audio and/or video entertainment not related to County business.
- Confidential or Misinformation - Release of misleading, distorted, untrue, or confidential materials regarding County business, views, or actions.
- Copyright Violations - Use that violates copyright laws.
  - Costs Incurred by County - Accessing any site that charges a fee unless pre-authorized in writing. If visited by mistake, do not give out any billing information such as credit card or business telephone. If asked for billing information, cancel out of the screen immediately.

- Discriminatory - Material that is in discriminatory towards a gender, race, religion, ethnicity, or disability.
- Games and Entertainment - Entertainment, sports, or games unless related to County business.
- Harassment - Harassing of employees, vendors, customers, members of the public and others.
- Obscenities - Pornographic, profane, or sexually explicit material.
- Political - Use for political purposes, including browsing political websites (those representing a political viewpoint, party, issue, or candidate), or partisan campaigning.
  - Purchases – Purchases of personal items. County purchasing policies apply for County business purchases.
  - Religious - Religious material or activities.
- Solicitation - Use that promotes monetary or business gain for the employee and/or the employee's family.
- Software - Download unauthorized software.
- Union Activities – Use for union purposes including communicating with membership.

The Department Head reserves the right to make final determinations as to what is considered acceptable in all cases of Internet use.

### **VIII. Harassment or Criminal Activity through the Internet.**

If you believe that you are or someone else is the victim of harassment or believe that criminal activity is taking place, please follow these procedures:

- Do not delete the message;
- Do not respond to the message; and
- Notify your supervisor, elected official/department head, Personnel Division, or appropriate designee.
- Notify Sheriff's Office.

### **IX. Employees May Use Electronic Communications for Qualified Education Programs.**

Employees may use County electronic communications, hardware, software and peripherals for QEP that enhance their job skills when:

- The supervisor and Department Head pre-authorizes participation;
- The employee uses his or her own paper and supplies;
- It occurs only during times authorized by the Department Head; and
- It does NOT require any additional hardware, software or peripherals

Employees authorized for QEP may have curriculum-related software loaded onto County hardware by Information Services. Loading personal software not related to the QEP is prohibited.

## **XI. Confidential Electronic Communications.**

Certain electronic communications are confidential and may not be accessed, used, or disclosed without authorization of the Department Head. Examples of confidential records appear in the list of public records exempt from public disclosure, at RCW 42.17.310 et seq. Confidentiality may also depend on the nature of the record and the particular policies of the office or department where it is maintained.

Employees may not access, use and disclose confidential information without authorization of the Department Head.

## **XII. Retaining E-mail for Recordkeeping.**

E-mail is primarily a communication system, not a recordkeeping system. E-mail messages may constitute public record material with legally mandated retention requirements, or may be information with no retention value. E-mail messages are public records when they are created or received in the transaction of public business and retained as evidence of official policies, actions, decisions or transactions. E-mail that has valuable informational content may also be a public record. E-mail messages that are public records must be identified, scheduled and retained just like records in other formats.

Public records should be retained in e-mail format only as long as they are being worked on or distributed. To assure appropriate management of public records with assigned retention periods generated or received through an e-mail system, transfer messages to paper, disk, or PC hard drive and file and retain according to the legal retention required for the informational content of each message. For public records with retentions of more than three years, producing a paper copy for filing purposes is recommended to eliminate possible migration problems.

E-mail messages, which are usually public records and must meet state records retention requirements include:

- Policy and Procedure Directives
- Correspondence or memoranda related to official public business
- Agenda and minutes of meetings
- Documents related to legal or audit issues
- Messages which document agency actions, decisions, operations and responsibilities
- Documents that initiate, authorize or complete a business transaction
- Drafts of documents that are circulated for comment or approval
- Final reports or recommendations
- Appointment calendars
  - E-Mail distribution lists
  - Other messages sent or received that relate to the transaction of state government business

Department Heads will set up procedures to identify, print and store voice mail and e-mail messages.

E-mail messages that are usually not public records, and may be destroyed when no longer needed include:

- Personal messages and announcements not related to official business
- Information-only copies, or extracts of documents distributed for reference or convenience, such as announcements or bulletins
- Phone message slips that do not contain information that may constitute a public record
- Copies of published materials
- Extra copies
- Preliminary drafts
- Request for information (but not Public Disclosure Requests)
- Routing slips
- Transmittal memos

The County keeps electronic e-mail backups for three months (effective January 1, 2002). The County keeps Internet access records for one year.

### **XIII. Disciplinary Action.**

If a user violates a provision of this Electronic Communications policy, the user may be subject to one or more of the following disciplinary actions:

- Restriction of electronic communication privileges
- Removal of electronic communication privileges
- Oral Warning
- Written reprimand
- Suspension
- Demotion
- Termination.