

ARTICLE 21

INTERNET and ELECTRONIC MAIL (E-MAIL) USE POLICY

21.01 INTERNET.

21.01.01 Purpose/Scope. To establish guidelines for appropriate use of the Internet by Vermilion County Offices, officials and employees.

21.01.02 Organizations Affected. All Vermilion County Government Offices and Departments.

21.01.03 Policy. Vermilion County is making every effort to provide its offices, officers and employees with the best technology available to conduct the County's official business. In this regard, the County has installed, at substantial expense, equipment such as computers and advanced technological systems such as electronic mail (e-mail) for use to conduct its official business. This document was created to advise all users regarding the access to and the disclosure of information created, transmitted, received and stored via the use of the Internet, County e-mail, and other Computers.

Access to the Internet is provided to County offices and employees for the purpose of conducting "official County business". The Internet may not be used for prohibited purposes, such as conducting private business, or political campaigning, or any illegal uses. Personal use of the Internet should be governed by the same tests of reasonableness as personal phone calls and internal e-mail. These include:

1. There is no cost associated with the use.
2. Use is moderate in time.
3. Use does not interfere with an employee's or co-workers' work.

The following rules require strict adherence. Any infraction thereof could result in disciplinary action. Disciplinary actions range from verbal warnings to termination; the severity of the misbehavior governs the severity of the disciplinary action.

1. The use of Internet is restricted to “official County business”. Personal use of or time spent for personal gain is strictly prohibited. Authorization for Internet access must be obtained through your department head or elected office holder. Once authorization is approved you are responsible for the security of your account password and you will be held responsible for all use or misuse of your account. You must maintain secure passwords and never use an account assigned to another user.
2. Hacking is the unauthorized attempt or entry into any other computer. Never make an unauthorized attempt to enter any computer. Such an action is a violation of the Federal Electronic Communications Privacy Act (ECPA) 18 U.S.C. § 2510.
3. Sending threatening, slanderous, racially and/or sexually harassing messages is strictly prohibited.
4. The representation of yourself as someone else, real or fictional, or a message sent anonymously is prohibited.
5. Never copy or transfer electronic files without permission.
6. Downloading a file from the Internet can bring viruses with it. Scan all downloaded files with standard virus prevention software.
7. Never send post or provide access to any confidential County materials or information.
8. Almost all data and software is subject to the Federal copyright laws. Care should be exercised whenever accessing or copying any information that does not belong to you. Software which requires purchase or reimbursement for its use, such as shareware, requires strict adherence to the terms and conditions specified by the owner unless written permission for unrestricted use has been obtained. When in doubt consult your office holder or department head.
9. You are obligated to cooperate with any investigation regarding the use of your computer equipment and which your office holder or department head has authorized.

10. Chain letters are illegal and may not be transmitted through e-mail.

11. E-mail requires extensive network capacity. Sending unnecessary e-mail, or not exercising constraint when sending very large files, or sending to a large number of recipients consumes network resources that are needed for critical County business. When the County grants an individual employee access to the network, it is the responsibility of the employee to be cognizant and respectful of network resources.

Because of the unique nature of the Internet, additional guidelines apply to its use:

1. Internet access, hardware and software must be authorized and installed by appropriate personnel in each County department. Employees authorized to download software or browser plug-ins should be provided with safety guidelines and virus protection software.

2. Certain features of the Internet can clog the County's network and e-mail system, and should be used only for work-related purposes.

3. Resources of any kind, for which there is a fee, must not be accessed or downloaded without prior approval from a supervisor.

4. Individual users must be aware of and at all times attempt to prevent potential County liability in their use of the Internet.

5. Employees should be aware that there is a wide variety of information on the Internet. Some individuals may find some information on the Internet offensive or otherwise objectionable. Individual users should be aware that the Vermilion County has no control over and can therefore not be responsible for the content of information available on the Internet.

21.02 ELECTRONIC MAIL (E-MAIL).

21.02.01 Introduction. Electronic mail (E-mail) refers to the electronic transfer of information typically in the form of electronic messages, memoranda, and attached documents from a sending party to one or more receiving parties via an intermediate telecommunications system. Stated differently, electronic mail is a means of sending messages between computers using a computer network. Electronic mail services, as defined in this policy, not only consist of the use of state-provided electronic mail systems but also the act of sending and/or receiving electronic mail across the Internet.

As with any County-provided resource, the use of electronic mail services should be dedicated to legitimate County business and is governed by rules of conduct similar to those applicable to the use of other information technology resources. Use of electronic mail services is a privilege, which imposes certain responsibilities and obligations on County users and is subject to County government policies and local, state, and federal laws.

Acceptable use must be legal, ethical, reflect honesty, and show restraint in the consumption of shared resources.

The user should not violate intellectual property rights, information ownership rights, system security mechanisms, and should not use electronic mail to intimidate, harass or annoy.

21.02.02 Purpose/Scope. The purpose of this “Electronic Mail Acceptable Use Policy” is to establish guidelines and minimum requirements governing the acceptable use of County-provided electronic mail (e-mail) services. By establishing and maintaining compliance with this policy, risks and costs to the County can be minimized while the valuable potential of this communication tool can be maximized.

The objectives of this policy are to:

1. Ensure that the use of County-provided electronic mail services is related to, or for the benefit of, Vermilion County government;
2. Inform users that electronic mail messages and documents are subject to the same laws, regulations, policies, and other requirements as information communicated in other written forms and formats;

3. Minimize disruptions to County government activities from inappropriate use of County-provided electronic mail services; and
4. Provide users with guidelines describing their personal responsibilities regarding confidentiality, privacy, and acceptable use of County-provided electronic mail services as defined by this policy.

This policy applies to any person(s) and/or contractor(s) (hereinafter referred to as “users”) whose access to or use of electronic mail services is funded by Vermilion County or is available through equipment owned or leased by Vermilion County.

21.02.03 Department/Office Responsibilities. All departments are responsible for the electronic mail activities of their users. County departments and offices have the responsibility to ensure that County-provided electronic mail services are used for internal and external communications which serve legitimate County government functions and purposes. Managerial authority over electronic mail services should be defined, and user training programs provided which address electronic mail usage and policies.

Vermilion County offices and departments may consider providing additional restrictions and guidelines regarding the use of electronic mail within their local environments. In considering the need for additional restrictions and guidelines, each office may take into account its particular needs, mission, available technology, level of staff training, size, and geographic diversity.

21.02.04 User Responsibilities. Electronic mail is not private communication. All information transmitted via Internet/electronic mail system(s) can be reviewed at any time. Electronic mail communications may best be regarded as a postcard rather than as a sealed letter. Disclosure may occur intentionally or inadvertently when an unauthorized user gains access to electronic messages. Disclosure may also occur when electronic mail messages are forwarded to unauthorized users, directed to the wrong recipient, or printed in a common area where others can read them.

Because of the various security, legal, and productivity issues referenced in this policy, each user has the following responsibilities:

1. As an electronic mail participant, each user must comply with this “Internet and Electronic Mail (E-mail) Use Policy.” By participating in the use of networks and systems provided by the County, users agree to comply with County and office policies governing their usage.
2. The content of anything exchanged (sent and/or received) via electronic mail communications must be appropriate and consistent with County policy, subject to the same restrictions as any other correspondence.
3. Electronic mail communications, if allowed to accumulate on a server, can quickly consume the server’s disk space and may cause system problems. Although deletion of unnecessary e-mail communications is encouraged, users should refer to an approved record retention schedule for proper procedure regarding disposition of electronic mail communications.
4. Be courteous and follow accepted standards of etiquette.
5. Protect others’ privacy and confidentiality.
6. Be responsible for the use of their electronic mail accounts.
7. Use information technology resources efficiently and productively.

21.02.05 Acceptable Use. Acceptable electronic mail activities are those that conform to the purpose, goals, and mission of the County office and to each user’s job duties and responsibilities. The following list, although not all-inclusive, provides some examples of acceptable uses:

1. Communications, including information exchange, for professional development or to maintain job knowledge or skills;
2. Use in applying for or administering grants or contracts;
3. Communications with other County, state agencies and business partners providing document delivery or transferring working documents/drafts for comment;

4. Announcements of County laws, procedures, hearings, policies, services, or activities;
5. Use involving research and information gathering in support of advisory, standards, analysis, and professional development activities related to the user's County governmental duties; and
6. Communications and information exchanges directly relating to the mission, charter, and work tasks of the office including electronic mail in direct support of work-related functions or collaborative projects.

21.02.06 Unacceptable Use. Unacceptable use can be defined generally as activities that do not conform to the purpose, goals, and mission of the agency and to each user's job duties and responsibilities. Any electronic mail usage in which acceptable use is questionable should be avoided. When in doubt, seek policy clarification prior to pursuing the activity.

21.02.07 Security Implications. Users should take all reasonable precautions, to prevent the use of their electronic mail account by unauthorized individuals.

Transmission of electronic mail to locations outside of the County's local area network may require the use of the Internet for transport. Since the Internet and its tools adhere to open and documented standards and specifications, it is inherently an unsecured network that has no built-in security controls.

Although confidential and sensitive information should not be included in electronic mail communications unless proper, formalized security precautions have been established, certain electronic mail communications may be privileged or confidential. It is the responsibility of each County office to protect confidential and sensitive information where intentional, inappropriate, or accidental disclosure of the information might expose Vermilion County or an individual to loss or harm.

21.03 DEFINITIONS.

Electronic Mail. Electronic Mail (e-mail) may include non-interactive communication of text, data, images or voice messages between a sender and designated recipient(s) by systems utilizing telecommunications links. It may also include correspondence transmitted and stored electronically using software facilities called "e-mail", "facsimile", or "messaging" system; or voice messages transmitted and stored for later retrieval from a computer system.

Guidelines. Recommendations derived from experience and which should be used.

Hacking. Attempting to break into another system on which you have no account or authorization.

Internet. A worldwide network of networks, connecting informational networks communicating through a common communications language, or "protocol".

Netiquette. A combination of "network" and "etiquette". It is the practice of good manners in a networked environment.

Policy. Primary objectives of the County of Vermilion as contained in this document.

Standards. Departmental directions or instructions describing how to achieve policy. Mandatory statement of direction.

Users. The public and County employees.

Vendors. Any private person or business enterprise.