North Kingstown Fire Department

Standard Operating Guidelines		2000 Series
Effective Date:	Code of Conduct / Ethics	Human Resources
03/2021		2050
Revision Date:		
03/2021		Page 1 of 3

I. PURPOSE

The United States and Rhode Island Constitutions, Statutes of the United States and State of Rhode Island, Ordinances and Personnel Rules and Regulations of the Town of North Kingstown and the North Kingstown Fire Department, Departmental Polices, Standard Operating Procedures, and General Orders shall govern the actions of each member. Any violation of the above laws rules, policies, or procedures may be cause for disciplinary action. Ignorance shall not be considered as a defense or justification for any such violation.

II. BACKGROUND

The Fire Service is a noble calling. One which is founded on mutual respect and trust between firefighters and the citizens they serve. To ensure the continuing integrity of the Fire Service, the highest standards of ethical conduct must be maintained at all times.

Ethics comes from the Greek word ethos, meaning character. Character is not necessarily defined by how a person behaves when conditions are optimal and life is good. It is easy to take the high road when the path is paved and obstacles are few or non-existent. Character is also defined by decisions made under pressure, when no one is looking. As members of the Fire Service, we share a responsibility to project an ethical character of professionalism, integrity, compassion, loyalty and honesty in all that we do.

We need to accept this ethics challenge and be truly willing to maintain a culture that is consistent with the expectations outlined in this document. By doing so, we can create a legacy that validates and sustains the distinguished Fire Service institution, and at the same time ensure that we leave the Fire Service in better condition than when we arrived.

III. DEFINITIONS

Code of Conduct: Set of rules about how to behave and conduct business for members of a group or organization.

IV. POLICY

This policy shall apply to all personnel. Nothing herein shall be construed as diminishing an employee's right to free speech under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution unless that speech impairs the public service for which the employee is paid to provide.

- Members shall be responsible for their own acts, and they shall not shift to others the burden of responsibility of executing or failing to execute a lawful order or a member's job duties.
- Members shall devote their duty time to the services of the Fire Department (Department) and shall not conduct private business that would create a conflict of interest or interfere with the proper performance of their duties.
- Members shall not engage in activities involving alcohol or other substance use or abuse that could impair the member's mental state or ability to perform his or her duties or compromise safety.
- Members are required to maintain a professional level of knowledge based upon position and qualification. It is also a requirement of the Department that all members maintain an adequate level of physical conditioning in order to respond to and perform at all fires, rescue, Hazmat and medical emergencies or other Departmental functions.
- Unsatisfactory performance may be demonstrated by an unwillingness or inability to perform assigned task, the failure to conform to established work standards of training, inspections, physical fitness, or other duties and failure to take appropriate action.
- Members shall not engage in any conduct or act that will bring discredit to the Department or the Town of North Kingstown (Town).
- Members shall never harass, threaten, or intimidate members of the public or other Department members. Members have a duty to report and stop such activity.
- Members shall obey the orders of those higher in the chain of command relating to job duties unless it is illegal or it places the subordinate in an unsafe operating position, nor intentionally violate the chain of command within the Department without appropriate justification.
- Members are prohibited from using their official position for obtaining privileges, gifts or discounts not otherwise available to them.
- Members shall not solicit or accept from any person, business or organization any valuable gift or benefit for the member of the Department except as permitted under Town or Department Policy.
- Members shall not publicly criticize or ridicule the Department, its policies, or other officers by speech, writing, or other expressions, where such speech is defamatory, obscene, unlawful, and untruthful or is not a matter of public concern and disrupts the harmony and efficiency of the Department.
- When engaging in social media or social networking activities, all personnel will maintain a level of professionalism in both on-duty and off-duty conduct that is consistent with the honorable mission of the department.
- Members shall not address gatherings, appear on radio or television, prepare any article for publication, act as correspondents to a newspaper or a periodical, release or divulge investigative information or any other departmental matters unless authorized by the Fire Chief.

- No member, while speaking as a private citizen on a matter of public concern, shall speak in such a way as to cause actual harm or disruption to the mission and functions of the fire department.
- Members may speak on a matter of public concern as a spokesperson for the department only with the permission of the Fire Chief and/or designee. The use of titles, Department logos, Department owned images, or identification as a member of the Department that creates the impression that a member is a spokesperson for the Department is prohibited.
- Members are prohibited from publicly discussing Department matters that are not a matter of public concern unless doing so is for the purpose of engaging in concerted activities relative to workplace issues.
- Members shall not engage in speech that is false, deceptive, libelous, slanderous, misleading or causes harm to others, including speech that constitutes hate speech or harassment; nor shall members discuss protected or confidential matters of the department, including:
    - Matters that are under investigation
    - Patient and employee information protected by HIPAA/medical confidentiality
    - Personnel matters that are protected from disclosure by law