 Corporate Procedure

# Employee Use of Internet and Electronic Mail

**Approved by**: County Council

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**References and Related Documents**

[Standards of Conduct Policy](https://greydocs.ca/urm/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=GC_106427&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&Rendition=Web)

[Behaviour Standards](https://greydocs.ca/urm/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=GC_110608&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&Rendition=Web)

[Scented Products in the Workplace](https://greydocs.ca/urm/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=GC_110589&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&Rendition=Web)

[Discrimination and Harassment](https://greydocs.ca/urm/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=GC_209832&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&Rendition=Web)

[Employee Use of Computers](https://greydocs.ca/urm/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=GC_110296&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&Rendition=Web)

**Forms**

[Employee Pledge of Confidentiality](https://greydocs.ca/urm/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=GC_104568&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&Rendition=Web)

[Harassment Complaint](https://greydocs.ca/urm/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=GC_065891&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&Rendition=Web)

[Computer Usage Policy Acknowledgement](https://greydocs.ca/urm/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=GC_104575&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&Rendition=Web)

## Purpose

The Internet is an electronic library of millions of documents, accessible day and night, with powerful search tools. Internet users can quickly find useful information on a wide range of topics. Unfortunately, the Internet also contains potentially harmful and inappropriate material.

Email is a valuable tool for communicating internally and externally. The use of email is governed by the same principles as those applied to other forms of communication, for example, courtesy, respect for other people, clear and concise expression and responsiveness. Email can effectively supplement meetings and phone calls. It is an ideal medium for straightforward things like meeting notices, questions and answers, quick updates, reports, and the like. A great advantage of email is that messages can be composed and sent when it is convenient for the sender, without interrupting the recipient, who can read it at his/her convenience. But without the facial expressions of personal conversation, and without the vocal intonations perceptible on the phone, email may not be appropriate for certain messages and it does not eliminate the need for face-to-face discussions.

Access to the Internet and email systems has been provided as business tools for employees and Councillors, to assist them in performing their responsibilities and to facilitate communications. The hardware and software for providing employees and Councillors with the Internet and e-mail access represents a considerable commitment of the Corporation’s resources for telecommunications, networking, storage, etc.

This procedure is designed to ensure that technology is used in accordance with the “Code of Ethics for Municipal Employees”, the “Discrimination and Harassment” Procedure and other existing County policies, and to eliminate the risk of having someone else send an email message using your own personal identification.

## Scope

This procedure applies to all corporate employees, contractors and elected officials using County owned resources.

### Use of the Internet and Email

The use and disclosure of email messages shall be covered under the provisions of the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. M.56 (MFIPPA).

Email messages shall be considered to be machine-readable records owned by the County, for the purposes of MFIPPA.

The County retains ownership in and shall have exclusive control over the reproduction of email messages.

Messages that are transmitted to all users or a large group of users must be urgent in nature and/or of general business interest to all users.

Departmental/common area bulletin boards and the County Intranet (Grey’p Vine) are an appropriate place to post messages which are either not urgent or are not of interest to all users.

Limited, occasional or incidental use of email for personal communication is acceptable, provided the privilege is not abused.

### Inappropriate Uses of Email

Inappropriate uses of email include, but are not limited, to:

* Messages that contain information which is, or may be, offensive or disruptive.
* Messages that contain information which is derogatory, defamatory or threatening in nature.
* Messages that contain information which is disseminated for a purpose which is illegal, or for a purpose which contravenes the County’s policies.
* Messages related to the operation of an employee’s personal business.
* Chain email message (chain letters).

### Privacy

Correspondence via Internet e-mail is NOT guaranteed to be private. Generally, information which is sensitive or confidential in nature should not be sent via Internet email, since absolute privacy cannot be guaranteed.

### Responsibility

Employees, elected officials and contractors (with a County of grey email account) are responsible for all electronic mail sent from their individual user name, and should take appropriate precautions to ensure the passwords are changed regularly and not shared.

### Acceptable Use of Internet and Email

Employees and councilors may use their Internet facilities for non-business research or browsing outside of work hours, provided that all other usage policies are adhered to.

Limited, occasional or incidental use of the network, during business hours, to access the Internet for any purposes other than for the business of the County of Grey is acceptable, providing the privilege is not abused.

### Prohibited Activities

Intentionally sending files or messages containing programs designed to disrupt other systems (commonly known as viruses).

Accessing another computer system without authorization inside or outside of the County’s network (commonly known as hacking).

Intentionally possessing, using, or transmitting unauthorized material, in violation of copyright restrictions.

Creating, viewing, storing, printing or re-distributing unlawful or potentially offensive material or information, in contravention of the Discrimination and Harassment Procedure, on any computer system accessed through the County’s network (this includes sexually explicit, obscene, or other potentially offensive material).

Sending messages which include profanity, sexual, racial, religious, ethnic slurs, or other abuse, threatening or otherwise offensive language (including chain letters).

### Monitoring of Internet and Email Services

All employees and elected officials should be aware that the County’s computer system creates a record of every internet site visited.

### Misuse of Internet and Email Services

Complaints concerning the violation of this policy are to be submitted to the appropriate supervisor.

Failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

### Blacklisting Internet Sites

The Corporation of the County of Grey reserves the right to blacklist any internet site that it deems to be inappropriate.

### Guidelines for the Use of Internet and Email

The following guidelines are provided to assist employees and elected officials in the constructive, courteous use of electronic mail (email).

An email system is different from other means of communication because of:

* The speed with which a communications can be initiated.
* The immediacy of feedback.
* It is not private.
* The message can become a permanent record.

It is as easy to send a message to a large group of people as it is to one person; therefore, use discretion before initiating messages to a wide audience. When the business message is relevant to the duties of a limited group of employees, the message should be sent only to those employees.

Single subject messages should be created whenever possible. For example, three short separate messages are better than one longer message, particularly where the message contains significant record content.

Reasonable editorship should be exercised, including use of the spell checker. Messages should be proofread and edited. The message must be clear, and should be written so that it cannot be misunderstood. Nothing should be said on e-mail that the sender would not want repeated and attributed to himself/herself.

Any message that is sent could be permanent, as the recipient could print or retain the message for future use. Messages sent by e-mail have an identifiable author whose name is part of the record.

Emotional responses should be avoided – in such cases messages should be reread before responding, and held for 24 hours and considered in the light of a new day. What is sent in haste and in some anger at a particular moment does not disappear. Attempts at humour or irony may not always work, as it is difficult to tell the level of formality of a message from its appearance.

If a message is received that is intended for another person, it should not be ignored but forwarded to the intended recipient, or the sender should be advised.