



# Guidelines: Firefighter Photography, Video and Social Media Use

It is a fact of the internet that every click, every view and every sign-up is recorded somewhere. Depending on your view, this is either very creepy or fantastically interesting. Social media has amazing uses; it enables firefighters to express a thought or opinion or share an experience at almost any time, from any location.

The capability can be very positive for the fire and aviation community. For example, new technologies can be used to provide documentation for accidents or provide helpful information to investigation or review teams. Social media provides an instant medium for messages and education. We can also use it to share with family, friends, or national audiences.

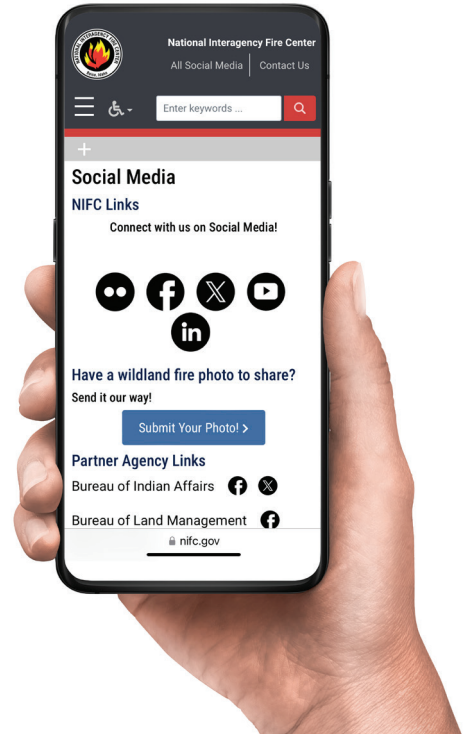
On the flip side, there have been instances of video or photographs taken in unsafe, unprofessional or embarrassing circumstances. When that happens, it reflects poorly on the entire fire and aviation community.

Wildland fire managers and supervisors don't want to police video and photo postings. They'd rather approach it in terms of "doing what's right" and allow employees to use their own judgment about what is appropriate and what is not; and trust them to know the difference.

This simple social media guide may help firefighters make decisions when it comes to posting on their personal social media accounts, because it's not always easy to discern the difference between appropriate and inappropriate.

## Always Maintain Situational Awareness

Firefighters are, of course, one of the best sources for fireline photos. Some of the most-liked images posted on NIFC and agency-specific social media platforms come from firefighters; however, it only takes a split second to forget your situational awareness. Although firefighters are always safety-oriented, please don't forget to pay attention to your safety while you're snapping images or shooting video on the fireline. A firefighter who is concentrating on a camera can't be looking up, looking down and looking all around.





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## Ponder Before You Post

If you are going to post anything work-related on your personal social media platforms, it's a good idea to read through the Department of Interior's Social Media Policy. The policy provides good tips and guidance for all DOI employees. For example, the policy states that you should not use a photo of yourself in official uniform as your profile picture and you shouldn't use your official title in posts or comments. The DOI Social Media Policy can be found at: <https://www.doi.gov/notices/Social-Media-Policy>

## Check It Before You Wreck It

Before you post a photo or video, take a minute to think about the content. Does the photo or video involve firefighters without proper PPE? Does the photo or video portray something that could embarrass you or your crew? If we pause long enough to reflect on whether the content is inappropriate, we can avoid posting something that could have negative effects on firefighters or the firefighting community. Once a video goes viral, it's out there and not much can be done to take it back. An unprofessional or unsafe activity will have a shelf life of years and may result in a disciplinary action.

## Compensation for Your Creation?

Questions about compensation or photo rights come up quite a bit. Although your fireline images may be unique and amazing, the U.S. government owns all copyrights photos and videos if they are taken while you are being paid as a federal employee. You are free to snap appropriate photos or shoot suitable videos and to share them with family, friends or firefighters, but you're not permitted to sell them or copyright them.

## Avoid Unwanted Surprises

If you do share work-related information on your personal social media, make sure it's information that is already available to the public.

For example, posting photos or information about homes that have just burned may create a horribly unwanted surprise for homeowners who have not been notified that their homes have been affected. It's always a good idea to pause and think about whether the information you're about to post is already public knowledge.

## Questions?

If you have any questions, feel free to contact your local public affairs specialist or call the National Interagency Fire Center's External Affairs staff: 208-387-5050.

