

Policy on E-Mail
Hennepin County
Minnesota

E-mail Policy

Internet and E-mail Use

Following is information from IPMA's Center for Personnel Research Series covering Internet, computers and e-mail use at work. For more on this topic, link to the CPR Series table of contents or contact the Center at cpr@ipma-hr.org or (703) 549-7100.

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E-MAIL POLICY

Hennepin County recently joined the many organizations and businesses that have written policies for the use of e-mail. The Hennepin E-Mail Policy was constructed by a team of employees from Human Resources and Employee Relations, Medical Center, Information Services, Internal Audit, County Attorney's Office and County Administration.

E-Mail Policy

The Hennepin County Electronic Mail System (e-mail) is designed to facilitate County business communication among employees and other business associates for messages or memoranda. Since no computer system is completely secure, the e-mail system is not intended to transmit sensitive materials, such as personnel decisions and other similar information which may be more appropriately communicated by written memorandum or personal conversation.

The e-mail system is County property and intended for County business. The system is not to be used for employee personal gain or to support or advocate for non-county related business or purposes. All data and other electronic messages within this system are the property of Hennepin County. E-mail messages may be County records depending on their content and therefore would need to adhere to department data retention schedules (see: Retention of E-mail, below).

In addition, the County through its managers and supervisors reserves the right to review the contents of employee's e-mail communications when necessary for County business purposes. Employees may not intentionally intercept, eavesdrop, record, read, alter, or receive other persons' e-mail messages without proper authorization. The misuse of e-mail privileges shall be disciplined in accordance with the Human Resource Personnel Rules, and/or other applicable rules or laws.

Department directors are responsible for the implementation and adherence of this policy within their departments. Department directors or their designee are encouraged to work with their departments' data security officer(s) toward that end. In the event that any department or division policy contradicts this policy, this policy shall govern. This policy may be changed only upon the written approval of the County Administrator.

General Information on Passwords

While you have a confidential password, users should be aware that this does not suggest that the system is for personal confidential communication, nor does it suggest that e-mail is the property right of the employee. The use of the e-mail system is for County business. Passwords should be periodically changed to ensure security of the e-mail system. Users should not share their password with anyone else.

Internet provides the County with significant access and dissemination of information to individuals outside of Hennepin County. The use of the County Internet system access and dissemination is intended to serve County business. Like all e-mail messages, Internet messages are capable of being forwarded without the express permission of the original author. Therefore, users must use caution in the transmission and dissemination of messages outside of the County, and must comply with all state and federal laws.

Prohibited Uses

Solicitation of funds, political messages, harassing messages and other such messages are specifically prohibited. All e-mail messages are subject to the Personnel Rules of Conduct and all state and federal rules, such as, open meeting laws, data practices act, and human rights act.

Retention of E-mail

Generally, e-mail messages are temporary communication which are non-vital and may be discarded routinely. However, depending on the content of the e-mail message, it may be considered a more formal record and should be retained pursuant to a department's record retention schedules. Examples of messages of this nature are: policy, decision making, connected to specific case files, contract related or otherwise an essential part of a larger record, or other memorandum of significant public business. As such, these e-mail messages are similar to printed communication and should be written with the same care. Each department director is responsible for establishing and maintaining department retention schedules for the information communicated through the e-mail system.

However, employees should be aware that when they have deleted a message from their mailbox it may not have been deleted from the e-mail system. The message may

be residing in the recipient's mailbox or forwarded to other recipients. Furthermore, the message may be stored on the computer's back-up system.

Bulletin Board and Conference Type Systems

Hennepin County e-mail bulletin board and conference type features (bulletin board) are to be used for County business purposes. Bulletin board type systems allow many users to access and exchange information with other users who are providing access to that bulletin board.

Bulletin board-type systems may be set-up to limit access to specific individuals. Most messages on a bulletin board-type system are accessible to many users or posted for public dissemination.

Department directors or their designee are responsible for the approval of establishing new bulletin boards. The procedure for opening a bulletin board or conference type system follows:

1. Department directors or their designee must authorize the establishment of the bulletin board based on the sponsor's (sponsor or requestor) stated business purpose. The County Administrator or an Associate County Administrator(s) must authorize the establishment of countywide bulletin board systems.
2. The bulletin board's sponsor must be identified on the board's status screen which can be displayed by executing the "Query" command. The sponsor will be responsible for maintaining and ensuring that the communication is consistent with the business purpose of the bulletin board. The status screen shall also provide a general description of the business purpose.
3. All e-mail addresses must have the name of the sponsor or owner listed on the status screen.
4. Bulletin Board access can be restricted to a few people, or to the general e-mail population, this determination should be made by the sponsor. Limited access by the requestor and guidelines for each user can provide some security for a specific bulletin board. Bulletin boards should be deleted once their business purpose is completed.

Applicability to Employees, Part-time Employees, Contractors, and Other Users

This e-mail policy applies to all employees, contractors, part-time employees, volunteers, and other individuals who are provided access to Hennepin County's e-mail system. Third parties should only be provided access to the Hennepin County e-mail system as necessary for their business purpose with the County, and only if they abide by all applicable rules. Contractors and third-party users who are in violation of this policy may be removed from the e-mail system and/or have their contract revoked. In addition, other legal remedies may be pursued.

Employee Termination, Leave of Absence, Vacation, and other

Employees who are terminated or laid off have no right to the contents of their e-mail messages and not allowed access to the e-mail system. Supervisors or management may access an employees e-mail if employees are on leave of absence, vacation, or are transferred from one department to another department and is necessary for County's business purposes.

Penalties

The misuse of e-mail privileges shall be disciplined in accordance with the Human Resource Personnel Rules and/or other applicable rules or laws. Violation(s) of the e-mail policy may be grounds for dismissal. In addition, violations of this policy or misuse of the e-mail system may be referred for criminal prosecution.