

USGS Guidelines for Employee Use of Social Media

For all uses of social media and online interaction, you should always consult and understand the following:

- [Social Media Policy \(DOI\)](#)
- [Social Media Guidebook \(DOI\)](#)
- [Ethics Guide for DOI Employees](#)
- [DOI Internet Acceptable Use Policy](#)
- USGS Use of Government Computers

Personal Use Disclaimer: If you're using social media (e.g., Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, etc.) for personal reasons you may want to add a phrase that clarifies that you are posting your own opinions. Even though you're acting in your own personal capacity, you're still an employee of the Federal Government. Some examples are "Tweets are my own" or "Posts are my own opinions", "What I share is my own opinion and not endorsed by any organization." We understand that it's not possible to add a phrase like this in every single post. However, all social media services do provide profile options where you can add such language. While this is not legally required, it is a good practice and something that can help sharpen the lines between your role as a public servant and your rights as a private citizen.

When you're **on duty**, you can use social media for personal reasons during approved "**personal use**" time – you **must** remain aware of how your use reflects upon you and the USGS.

- See: [DOI Internet Acceptable Use Policy](#)
- See: USGS Use of Government Computers

When you're **on duty**, you may use social media to write **guest posts or one-off blog posts** when talking about your area of expertise. However, if the guest post or one-off blog post is an information product, as defined in [SM Chapter 205.18, Fundamental Science Practices — Authority to Approve Information Products](#) (12/13/11), it must receive appropriate review and approval in accordance with [SM Chapter 502.4, Fundamental Science Practices — Review, Approval, and Release of Information Products](#) (12/16/11).

- See: [Bureau Social Media Lead](#)
- See: [Social Media and the Hatch Act](#)

When you're **on duty**, you can use social media to **regularly talk** about your area of expertise, **if approved** by Office of Communications and Publishing and your supervisor — you **must** remain aware of how your use reflects upon you and the USGS.

- See: [Bureau Social Media Lead](#)
- See: [Social Media and the Hatch Act](#)

When you're **on duty**, you can use social media to **respond to a comment, post, bulletin board, discussion forum, correct a scientific inaccuracy**, etc. as it is related to your area of expertise — you **must** remain aware of how your use reflects upon you and the USGS.

- See: [Social Media Response Considerations](#) (end of document)
- See: [DOI Internet Acceptable Use Policy](#)

When you're **off duty**, you can use social media **for personal reasons** — you **must** remain aware of how your use reflects upon you and the USGS.

When you're **off duty**, you can use social media to talk about **your area of expertise**. If...

- **you're asked/approached** by a non-Federal organization **to regularly contribute** to one of their organization's official websites or social media — you **must** remain aware of how your use reflects upon you and the USGS.
- **on your own initiative/decision**, you are **responding to a comment, post, bulletin board, discussion forum, correct a scientific inaccuracy**, etc. as it is related to your area of expertise — you **must** remain aware of how your use reflects upon you and the USGS.

If you will be receiving compensation for contributing to a non-Federal organization's websites or social media presences on matters related to your USGS job or the USGS mission, you must receive prior Ethics Office approval via Form 9-1510 (Ethics Approval for Outside Work or Activities).

Errors in Official Posts: In the event there is an error or inaccuracy in an official USGS post, employees should contact the USGS account through that account service directly, or email [socialmedia \[at\] usgs \[dot\] gov](mailto:socialmedia@usgs.gov), to provide the corrected information. All suggestions will be confirmed and, if an error was made, a correction will be made through that service.

Training: The USGS encourages the strategic use of social media for the organization. We provide our employees with internal resources to stay informed about social media at the USGS and offer training sessions for employees and programs when requested on the use of social media at the USGS, expectations of that use, and tools and resources to get started. At all times, employees are encouraged to contact us at [socialmedia \[at\] usgs \[dot\] gov](mailto:socialmedia@usgs.gov) if they have any questions related to social media use at the USGS.

Comments: You must always remain aware of how your use of social media reflects upon you and the USGS. Keep in mind that any use of social media (on duty or off duty) may generate conversations through comments and sharing which can quickly transition to unintended areas.

Political Activity

As an election season starts to wind up, people will naturally want to share, post, and comment on politically related content, campaigns, etc. As a federal employee, you have a responsibility to know how you can, or can't, interact with politically-related posts on social media sites using **personal or official** accounts.

Depending on the type of employee you are, you will have different restrictions.

The Office of Special Counsel (OSC) is the independent Federal agency with the responsibility for enforcing the Hatch Act. Consult the FAQs on the [OSC website](#) for information regarding social media use, the Hatch Act and political activity. Alternatively, you may contact the [Department of the Interior Hatch Act Compliance Team](#) at with specific questions.