



GENERAL ORDER

GENERAL ORDER 100.22

Code of Conduct

OFFICE OF THE FIRE CHIEF

Issue Date: December 6, 2012

Revision Date: June 22, 2015

1 APPLICABILITY

2 All personnel.

3 POLICY

4 The purpose of this policy is to establish a Code of Conduct aimed at ensuring that members of
5 the Department maintain the highest level of integrity and ethical conduct both on and off
6 duty. The nature of firefighting and emergency services work places all members in a position
7 of public trust and subject to public scrutiny, and thus requires a level of conduct that is beyond
8 reproach, regardless of work status or location. Thus, it is important that all members strive to
9 achieve the highest level of ethical and professional conduct necessary to maintain the integrity
10 of individual members and the Department as a whole.

11
12 All members of the Department must effectively work as a team to protect their own safety and
13 the safety of their co-workers, and to provide effective firefighting and emergency services to
14 the public. Failure to adhere to a certain level of conduct undermines the public's confidence in
15 individual members and the Department as a whole.

16 DEFINITIONS

17 ➤ None

18 PROCEDURES

19 GENERAL:

- 20 • The Department is committed to providing effective firefighting and emergency services to
21 the citizens and visitors of Howard County. The Department relies on the pride of its
22 members as firefighters and emergency service providers, their loyalty to the profession,
23 the Department, and fellow members, and their dedication to providing outstanding
24 professional services to the community. The Department can only succeed in its mission if
25 its individual members maintain their personal integrity. The cornerstone of the
26 Department is its relationship with the community it serves.
- 27 • Each member is responsible for his or her actions and the effective interaction with other
28 members to make an effective and cohesive team. Conduct that does not adhere to
29 appropriate standards for the firefighting and emergency services professions impugns the



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30 integrity of individual members, which, in turn, reflects on the Department as a whole, and
31 impacts the Department's ability to serve the public.

- 32 • As members of the Department and/or employees of Howard County, all members are
33 expected to comply with established rules and regulations, including Departmental policies
34 and procedures, the Howard County Code, County Policies and Procedures, and the Howard
35 County Employee Manual as applicable. In adopting a Code of Conduct, the Department
36 intends to further clarify what constitutes both acceptable and unacceptable conduct, with
37 the goal of promoting positive conduct and preventing conduct that undermines the
38 integrity of the Department and its members.
- 39 • This policy applies to a member's conduct as a whole; this includes a member who is on-
40 duty and may be applicable to a member who is off-duty if the member's conduct has a
41 connection to the member's official duties. This policy is applicable regardless if the
42 misconduct occurs in-person or through some other means, such as social media.
- 43 • The performance of the Department depends on each member's character, motivation,
44 loyalty to the emergency service profession, self-discipline, adherence to the chain of
45 command, obedience to orders, appropriate action in the absence of a specific order, and
46 orderly interaction with other members of the Department in order to accomplish a
47 common objective. The Department expects that every member will exercise a high level of
48 self-discipline to enable the Department to meet this goal.
- 49 • At times, members of the Department may violate applicable rules and regulations or
50 engage in conduct that brings disrepute on individual members or the Department as a
51 whole. A Code of Conduct is necessary not only to set minimum standards of conduct the
52 Department expects of its members, but also to alert members to the possibility of
53 disciplinary action for failure to adhere to specified minimum standards of conduct and
54 professionalism.

55

56 FUNDAMENTAL EXPECTATIONS:

- 57 • The Department has certain fundamental expectations of its members. These fundamental
58 expectations do not themselves constitute specific rules of conduct, and accordingly, are
59 not the basis for disciplinary action. Instead, the Department hopes every member will
60 strive to demonstrate these characteristics that are consistent with the highest level of
61 professionalism and personal integrity.
 - 62 ○ **Selflessness and dedication** – the commitment of oneself to one's community is the
63 foundation of the firefighting and emergency services professions and the volunteer
64 corporations. Selflessness exists in the dedication and actions of firefighters and
65 emergency services personnel to ensuring the health, safety, and welfare of their
66 fellow members and the community.
 - 67 ○ **Loyalty** – The Department expects that every member will be loyal to the principles
68 that underlie the firefighting and emergency services professions, to their fellow
69 members, the commitment of service to others, the mission of the Department, and
70 the oath of office.
 - 71 ○ **Duty** – All members are expected to use their training and experience to protect the
72 public, their fellow members, and themselves and to faithfully and diligently carry out
73 their assigned tasks, to adhere to the chain of command, and to meet the



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- 74 requirements of their respective positions and applicable licensing or certification
75 standards. Anything less violates the trust placed in the Department by the
76 community. All members are expected to perform assigned tasks throughout their full
77 tours of duty.
- 78 ○ **Judgment** – Each member of the Department is responsible for the appropriate
79 exercise of judgment commensurate with the member’s rank, responsibility, and
80 assigned job tasks, after carefully considering the guidance offered by applicable laws,
81 policies and procedures, and professional standards.
 - 82 ○ **Demeanor and Bearing** – The public’s perception of and trust in the Department
83 greatly depend on the actions, appearance, and attitudes of its individual members.
84 All members are expected to present themselves in a professional manner designed to
85 promote and maintain the integrity of the Department and its members and the public
86 confidence in the Department.
 - 87 ○ **Role of Supervisors** – The Department expects Supervisors and command staff to
88 demonstrate conduct that exemplifies the highest professional and ethical standards.
89 Officers must be leaders and are expected to use their training, experience, and
90 judgment to motivate, manage, and direct subordinate members to perform their
91 duties and to work as a cohesive team in carrying out the Department’s mission, even
92 when forced to make decisions that are unpopular or difficult. Supervisors and
93 command staff must be accountable not only for themselves, but also for the conduct
94 and performance of the individuals they supervise.

95 96 **RULES OF CONDUCT:**

- 97 ● The Department has established these specific rules of conduct for its members that go
98 beyond Departmental expectations. These rules are not intended to be an exclusive list and
99 violations of these rules of conduct may be used as the basis for disciplinary action.
- 100 ○ Compliance with Policy
 - 101 ■ Members shall not commit any act or fail to commit any act that would
102 constitute a violation of County or Departmental policy.
 - 103 ■ This may include, but is not limited to: Department General Orders, Special
104 Orders, memoranda, directives, the Howard County Employee Manual, County
105 Policies and Procedures, and the Howard County Code as applicable.
 - 106 ■ In accordance with the Howard County Code, all employees are expected to
107 comply with the Drugs and Alcohol Policy as defined in the Employee Manual
108 and/or the Substance Abuse Policy as defined in the current Collective
109 Bargaining Agreement.
- 110 ○ Compliance with Laws
 - 111 ■ Members shall obey all local, State, and federal laws and the laws of any
112 foreign country they visit.
 - 113 ■ Any member who is arrested or charged with a criminal violation or a serious
114 traffic violation as described in section 26-202 of the Maryland Transportation
115 Code, or learns that he or she is the subject of a criminal investigation must
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- 117 notify the Department as required by General Order 100.16: Notification of
118 Legal Action.
- 119 ▪ A misdemeanor or felony conviction, guilty plea, or finding of guilt shall be
120 assumed to be an admission of a violation of this section.
 - 121 ▪ From an employment perspective, the Department may take appropriate
122 disciplinary action against its employees regardless of pending criminal actions,
123 charges, or citations.
- 124
- 125 ○ Performance
 - 126 ▪ While on duty, members shall not engage in activities that cause them to
127 neglect or be inattentive to their assigned duties.
 - 128 ▪ While on duty, members shall at all times remain available and in a sufficient
129 and appropriate stage of readiness to quickly respond to any situation
130 requiring performance of their assigned duties and responsibilities of their
131 positions.
 - 132 ▪ Members may not leave their duty posts without the approval of their
133 supervisor.
 - 134 ▪ Members shall maintain competency and fitness sufficient to perform their
135 assigned duties and responsibilities associated with their positions.
 - 136 ▪ Inability or unwillingness to meet performance standards may include, but are
137 not limited to:
 - 138 • Repeated or consistent lack of knowledge of applicable laws or policies.
 - 139 • Unwillingness or inability to perform assigned tasks.
 - 140 • Failure to meet standards associated with the member's rank, grade, or
141 position.
 - 142 • Repeated unsatisfactory performance evaluations and/or the inability or
143 unwillingness to improve performance with appropriate remedial training
144 or education.
 - 145 • Failure to maintain or renew required licenses and/or certifications
146 associated with the member's rank, grade, or position.
 - 147
 - 148 ○ Discrimination, Threats, and/or Harassment
 - 149 ▪ The Department has "zero tolerance" for any form of discrimination,
150 harassment, sexual harassment, or threats in the workplace.
 - 151 ▪ Members shall not threaten, verbally or physically assault, strike, or harass any
152 member of the Department, County employee, or member of the public.
 - 153 ▪ As required by federal, State, and/or County law, members shall not
154 discriminate against nor harass any citizen or member in a protected class,
155 including, but not limited to: on the basis of race, age, national origin, religion,
156 gender, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity.
 - 157 ▪ A member shall not engage in retaliatory conduct against any member of the
158 Department or public who reports alleged violations of Departmental policies
159 and procedures, who participates in any investigation of an alleged violation,



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160 or who reports discriminatory practices or participates in an investigation of
161 such practices.

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163 ○ Insubordination

164 ■ Members may not intentionally engage in conduct, through actions or words,
165 which are disrespectful to, or that otherwise undermines the authority of, a
166 supervisor or the chain of command.

167 ■ Members shall comply with the chain of command and shall obey any lawful
168 order of a superior or a person authorized to be in command.

169 ● If a member is given an order that conflicts with an existing order, the
170 member shall notify the superior giving the latter order. If that order is
171 repeated, it will stand.

172 ● They shall not obey any order which they reasonably believe to be
173 immoral, unsafe, or illegal.

174

175 ○ Conduct Unbecoming

176 ■ A member shall not engage in conduct that is unbecoming to the member,
177 the Department, the County, or the profession.

178 ■ Conduct unbecoming includes any conduct that would bring the County,
179 Department, or member into disrepute or dishonor; or would disgrace the
180 integrity of the profession; or undermine public trust; or would be
181 detrimental to the operation and efficiency of the Department.

182

183 ○ Honesty

184 ■ Members shall not intentionally or willfully make any false statement,
185 either verbal or written, or withhold material information associated with
186 the members' position, official duties, or the Department's official business.

187 ■ Members shall not lie, steal, cheat, or make intentionally deceptive
188 statements associated with the members' position, official duties, or the
189 Department's official business.

190 ■ Members shall not knowingly enter or cause to be entered any inaccurate
191 or false information into an official record of the Department.

192

193 ○ Employee Relationships

194 ■ Personal relationships between members shall not interfere with the
195 performance of a member's duties.

196 ■ Supervisors may not have romantic or sexual relationships with members in
197 their direct chain of command and shall be responsible for alerting the
198 appropriate Bureau Chief to determine whether reassignment is required.

199 ■ For purposes of performance evaluations, the Department will not assign an
200 employee to a supervisor who is a blood relative, spouse, or romantic
201 partner.

202 ● Incidental or temporary assignments are not considered a violation of
203 this policy.



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- 204 ▪ Members may not engage in sexual acts or conduct while on duty.
- 205
- 206 ○ Abuse of Position
- 207 ▪ Members shall not use their positions as members of the Department
- 208 and/or as County employees for personal gain for themselves or others or
- 209 to obtain for themselves or others some benefit not available to the general
- 210 public.
- 211 ▪ This includes, but is not limited to: the use of Departmental identification
- 212 cards, badges, uniforms, insignia, or equipment.
- 213 ▪ Members shall not lend their identification cards or badges to anyone, nor
- 214 allow them to be reproduced without Departmental approval.
- 215 ▪ Members may not use their position with the Department or Howard
- 216 County, including Departmental identification cards, badges, uniforms,
- 217 insignia, or equipment, in connection with an endorsement, advertisement,
- 218 or testimonial.
- 219 ▪ No part of the Departmental uniform, badge, logo, identification card,
- 220 insignia, or equipment shall be used in a way that brings disrepute on an
- 221 employee or the Department.
- 222
- 223 ○ Confidentiality of Information
- 224 ▪ Members shall not disclose or disseminate any information, including
- 225 pictures and/or video, obtained or retained by the Department or
- 226 pursuant to the members' official duties that is confidential and not
- 227 generally available to the public, except as authorized by the Department.
- 228 ▪ Members shall not use their authority to obtain information that would
- 229 not be obtainable by the public, unless necessary to carry out the official
- 230 business of the Department and/or the job duties of members.
- 231
- 232 ○ Public Statements and Appearances
- 233 ▪ Members shall not hold themselves out as speaking on behalf of the
- 234 Department or the County unless authorized to do so.
- 235
- 236 ○ Courtesy
- 237 ▪ Members of the Department shall treat members of the public, County
- 238 employees, and other Department members with the respect and courtesy
- 239 expected in a professional environment.
- 240 ▪ No member, in the performance of his or her duties, shall address another
- 241 individual in a way that can reasonably be interpreted as violent,
- 242 derogatory, or discriminatory.

REFERENCES

- 244 • None
- 245



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246 **SUMMARY OF DOCUMENT CHANGES**

247 Changes in lines 39-42, 175-181 and 232-234 serve to clarify the policy and further define
248 conduct unbecoming to bring it in line with current case law.

249 **FORMS/ATTACHMENTS**

- 250 • None

251 **APPROVED**

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