



ACTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

DEPARTMENT MANUAL; P&P: Operations		
POLICY & PROCEDURE # 1.39	DATE OF ISSUE: 02/06/2020	EFFECTIVE DATE: 02/13/2020
SUBJECT: Alternate Communication Methods	ISSUING AUTHORITY: Chief Richard Burrows	
REFERENCE(S): Massachusetts Police Accreditation Commission # 81.2.10	<input type="checkbox"/> NEW <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AMENDS <input type="checkbox"/> RESCINDS	

I. PURPOSE

This policy is meant to establish guidelines for the use of alternative methods of communication by all employees while on duty as well as the distraction created by the use of unauthorized electronic devices. The availability of cellular phones, PDA's wireless internet, and other methods of communication can offer great convenience to employees. However, their use may initiate concerns regarding Department communication protocols as well as officer safety. The Acton Police Department recognizes its employees may wish to carry portable cellular phones or other device(s) capable of sending text messages and instant messages while on duty.

II. POLICY

A. Personal Cell Phones [81.2.10 (2A)]

While on duty, employees choosing to carry a personal cellular phone or other electronic device capable of sending and receiving texts or instant messages shall be subject to the following procedures and restrictions:

1. Employees may possess personal cellular phones while on duty. Personal use of cellular phones including texting shall be done out of the public eye. Phones should be left in a silent or vibrate mode while on duty to protect the officers from exposing themselves in tactical or covert situations.
2. Employees may not use personal cellular phones, nor shall they employ texts or instant messaging for the purpose of conducting department-related investigations in the line of duty, unless the officer receives permission via the radio system from the shift supervisor, or in emergency situations. This does not include calls to and from the shift supervisor for information or guidance.

If the shift supervisor gives permission for personal cellphone use, the Town of Acton and the Acton Police Department accept no liability for monetary charges resulting from such use.

3. Officers must recognize that using their personal cellular phone for calling, texting, or instant messaging instead of using the established communication protocols, policies, or procedures established by the Department, subjects the employee's personal cellphone to discovery by a defendant. Employees shall make all reasonable efforts to utilize the Department's phone and radio systems when making or returning police-related telephone calls or transmitting official information.
4. Cell phones can cause distractions during their use, especially while operating a motor vehicle. Therefore, the use of hands-free devices is strongly encouraged. Employees should refrain from using personal cellular phones while operating police vehicles. Employees are reminded that texting while operating a motor vehicle is a violation of *Massachusetts General Law (c. 90 s. 8M)*.
5. Private phone calls made or received should be kept to a minimum so as to avoid interruptions in police operations and prevent distractions from diligent service.
6. Employees of the Acton Police Department, who choose to have a personal cellular phone available to them while on duty, shall abide by this policy regarding their use. Any violations of this policy may result in the employee not being permitted to carry a personal cellular phone while working.
7. Employees recognize that the Town of Acton is not responsible for damaged or lost personal cellular phones. This policy is in effect for all persons who may be under the direction or control of the Acton Police Department; including but not limited to, all sworn and unsworn Acton Police personnel.

B. Department-issued Cell Phones [81.2.10 (1A)]

1. Department-issued cell phones are intended to be used primarily for Department business. Department members may make reasonable use of Department-issued cell phones for personal calls but may be held responsible for costs if use is excessive or abusive.

2. Employees issued a Department cell phone shall make every effort to utilize the phone for business purposes. Private phone calls made or received should be kept to a minimum to avoid interruptions in police operations.
3. Department cell phones are considered Department property and the officer is responsible for their proper care and custody.
4. While on duty, employees who are issued Department cell phones must carry and answer the Department cell phone.
5. Employees, who are issued a Department cell phone, should carry and answer their cell phone at all reasonable times, however, it is understood that an officer cannot be expected to be available or to answer calls on their Department-issued cell phone on a 24/7 basis.
6. When an officer is reassigned from an assignment (where they were issued a cell phone) to an assignment where they are not issued a cell phone or will be on an extended absence for any reason, their department-issued cell phone will be turned into their supervisor.

C. Voice-over Internet [81.2.10]

Another method of communication is Voice-over-Internet. Employees are allowed to use Voice-over Internet only for police business, as security concerns are paramount. Officers should attempt to use other methods prior to utilizing Voice-over Internet communications.

ALTERNATE COMMUNICATION METHODS INFORMATION

History: Manual I, Section III.