

These FAQs are designed to supplement the FAQs issued in January of 2009.

The County's acceptable use policy (the "Policy") is intended to inform employees what they can and cannot do on county email and on county computers. Sending certain types of emails is strictly prohibited by section 5.3 of the Policy (see Exhibit A for excerpt from Policy). These emails are referred to in these FAQs as **prohibited emails**. Prohibited emails include:

- Emails that are pornographic, offensive, indecent, obscene, sexual or sexually suggestive in nature.
- Emails that are discriminatory, harassing or offensive.
- Emails that involve gambling.
- Emails for your personal business.
- Emails that are political in nature.

You may be disciplined for sending even one prohibited email. It is permissible to send or receive a small number of personal emails from your county email account. This is known as “minimal personal use” under the Policy. Minimal Personal Use is brief in duration and frequency and does not interfere with or impair the conduct of official County business. Minimal personal use rule is measured, at least in part, by the amount of time the non-work related website is up and running, even if minimized in the background. However, the minimal personal use exception does not allow you to send a prohibited email. You may be disciplined, up to and including termination, if you send prohibited email.

What should I do if I receive a prohibited email at work? If you receive a prohibited email at your King County email address, you should tell the sender not to send any similar emails to you at your county email address, forward the email to your supervisor or department HR representative, and delete the email. If you fail to follow these steps, you may be disciplined. Likewise, if you forward a prohibited email, even **once**, from your county email (other than reporting it to your supervisor), you may be disciplined, up to and including termination. The following FAQs are designed to help employees understand what types of emails are prohibited under the Policy. **If you have any question about whether an email is appropriate to forward or save to your county computer, check with your supervisor. *When in doubt, throw it out***

OFFENSIVE, INDECENT OR DISCRIMINATORY EMAIL

Q: Is there a list of what types of emails or materials that the county considers to be prohibited?

A: 5.3.6 of the Policy describes broadly what types of emails are prohibited. If you have a question as to whether an email is prohibited, ask your supervisor.

Q: I noticed that 5.3.6 of the Acceptable Use Policy prohibits me from sending offensive email. I am not offended by the material and I know my co-worker will not be offended by the material, may I send it only to my coworker on my county email?

A: No. If the content of the material could be offensive to anyone at King County, you should not send it. Ask yourself if you would be comfortable with your supervisor or the King County Executive being copied on the message?

Q: I am Asian and send racial jokes about Asians to an Asian coworker on county email. Is this ok?

A: No. It is not appropriate to send racial jokes of any kind to anyone on county email.

Q: I like to send jokes to people at work on the county's email because it is fun and makes people laugh. Some of the jokes I send are about old people, fat people, bald people, disabled people, etc... It is not about anyone in particular. Will I get in trouble for this?

A: Yes, you will get in trouble for sending these types of jokes. These types of jokes are not appropriate to send on your county email. Any joke that makes fun of a person due to their age, disability, or ethnicity will not be tolerated. Such jokes also may violate the County's anti-discrimination policy. It is best to refrain from emailing jokes .

SEXUALLY EXPLICIT EMAIL

Q: What is the definition of sexually explicit material?

A: Any material that shows, describes or depicts the private parts of a person or describes or depicts a sexual act. This could include photographs, illustrations, comics, cartoons, or jokes.

Q: Is it ok to send an email if the private parts of a person are censored by blurring those parts or covered by black bars?

A: No. Such an email is still considered to be offensive, sexually explicit, indecent, offensive or obscene material and is prohibited.

Q: Is indecent material limited to the topic of private body parts?

A: No. Indecent material can include, but is not limited to, showing, describing, or depicting private body parts, bodily functions, sexual relations, or profane or obscene language. Jokes about gender, age, marital status, pregnancy, physical attributes, and sexuality can also be considered indecent.

Q: I like to send jokes to my coworker on county email involving illustrations that contain a reference to nudity or sexuality. My coworker likes it and thinks it is funny. Is this ok?

A: No, this is not appropriate and constitutes a prohibited email. It is best to refrain from sending jokes of any kind on county email.

- Q. I am thinking about downloading a screen saver to my computer that is a nude Picasso painting. Is this ok?
- A. No, while the image is of a painting by a world renowned artist, it is a nude image and not appropriate for the workplace.
- Q. My coworker sent me an email at my work email address with a picture of a nude woman. May I forward the email to my personal email to view later at home and then delete the email on my county email?
- A. No. It is not appropriate to forward a prohibited email to your home email. Instead, you should tell your coworker not to send those types of emails to you at work. You should then forward that email to your supervisor or your department HR staff and delete the email from your inbox.
- Q. I receive an email at work from a friend that contains various nude images. I download those images to a thumb drive attached to my work computer to view later at home and then delete the email. Is this okay?
- A. No. It is not appropriate to use a county computer or server to transfer images that are nude, pornographic or salacious in nature to your thumb drive or other device. The proper procedure is to tell your friend not to send those types of email to you at work, forward that email to your supervisor or HR representative and then delete the inappropriate email.
- Q. I received an email from a coworker on my county email that contained images from the Victoria Secret's catalog. I want to forward this to another coworker. I am a man and my coworker is a man so I know sending this email will not offend him. Is forwarding this email from my county email account ok?
- A. No. Victoria Secret's catalog is known for images that could be described as suggestive or salacious and as such are not appropriate for work email. Many of the pictures in the catalog are of scantily clad women and are considered offensive in the workplace, even if they are not offensive to you or your coworker. Sending this type of email is not appropriate for the workplace and violates the Policy.
- Q. Do these same rules apply to my personal email account when I access it on a County computer?
- A. Generally yes. A County computer should not be used to create, access, display view, or transmit content that would otherwise violate the Policy. This includes charitable solicitations not connected to a County charitable giving campaigns,, gambling, political activities, and conducting private business or personal for-profit activities.

OTHER TYPES OF IMPERMISSIBLE USES OF COUNTY EMAIL OR COMPUTERS

- Q: May I play games on my computer during lunch and break times?
- A: Generally No. Downloading games onto county computers can undermine the security of county information and databases stored on county computers. It is also an inappropriate use of county resources. Nevertheless, subject to management approval, a brief and occasional personal use, during lunch or break times, of a game that was preloaded on the computer by the computer manufacturer or operating system would be allowed under the Policy's minimal use rule.
- Q. May I send emails of a political nature if they are minimal in number?
- A: No. The allowance of minimal personal use does not apply to political or campaign activities, which are prohibited outright by the Policy.
- Q. May I look at political websites?
- A: No. Employees shall refrain from using King County computers for any political activity, including accessing political websites.
- Q. May I send emails that include religious content?
- A: Generally no. The King County's Anti-Harassment and Discrimination Policy prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion. The Policy prohibits use of county computers to create, access, display or transmit offensive or discriminatory material. While sending an email to notify others of a prayer vigil for victims of a terrorist attack or natural disaster would not violate either policy, emails or websites that espouse a single religious view point may be offensive to other employees and therefore are improper. Similarly, emails or websites that tout one religious faith as superior to other religious faiths could be considered discriminatory and therefore are improper.
- Q. May I play online poker?
- A: No. King County employees may not use county computers or email to create, access, or in any way participate in online gambling at any time.
- Q May I participate in a March Madness pool or other sports pool with other County employees that involves a spreadsheet or data maintained online, via email or on county computers?
- A: No. King County employees may not participate in gambling at the work place, whether it is through hand-written, oral or computer means. Further, the Policy prohibits the use of computers for unlawful activities, including gambling.
- Q May I access Facebook or Twitter during work hours on my county computer or cell phone?

A: Yes, provided it is minimal within the meaning of “Minimal Personal Use” set forth in the Policy. It is acceptable to access one’s Facebook or Twitter account during breaks. It is not acceptable to have a Facebook and/or Twitter website minimized on one’s computer for the purpose of accessing it continually throughout the day. Nor may you have other non-work related websites minimized on your computer throughout the day, (for example, news sites, email accounts, or sports sites).

Q: I have a home business selling personal beauty products. May I invite my county coworkers to attend a sales event I am hosting?

A: You can ask your coworkers for their home email addresses and send them an email from your home email if you want to invite them to your sales event. You may not send the invitation with your county email, and should not send the invitation to your coworkers’ county email addresses.

Q: May I send an email from my County email address or my personal email address to parents of the kids on my child’s soccer team about upcoming deadlines to order uniforms?

A: Yes, provided such use is brief in duration and does not interfere with the performance of official duties. It is preferable for employees to use their personal email account to send email communications, like this one, which are of a personal nature.

Remember to “think” before your “click” and when in doubt, throw it out

Attachment A.

Prohibited Use of Information Assets: Workforce Members shall refrain from using King County Information Assets for prohibited uses at all times, including during breaks or outside of their regular business hours. Prohibited use of Information Assets is subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination from county employment. Prohibited uses includes but is not limited to the following illustrative list of actual or attempted use of Information Assets to:

- 5.3.1 Conduct private or personal for-profit or unauthorized not-for-profit activities. This includes use for private purposes such as business transactions, private advertising of products or services, and any activity meant to foster personal gain;
- 5.3.2 Conduct any political activity;
- 5.3.3 Conduct any solicitation for any purpose except those officially sanctioned by King County such as the County Charitable Campaign;
- 5.3.4 Access any restricted, non-public computing resources, databases, Systems, etc. inside or outside of King County to which they may have legitimate access, to perform their assigned duties, for non-assigned (personal) purposes;
- 5.3.5 Conduct any unlawful activities as defined by federal, state, and local laws and/or regulations;
- 5.3.6 Create, access, display or transmit sexually explicit, indecent, offensive, harassing or intimidating, obscene, pornographic, defamatory, libelous material or material that could reasonably be considered discriminatory, offensive, threatening, harassing, or intimidating, except as a necessary part of bona fide work related activities;
- 5.3.7 Create, access, or participate in online gambling;
- 5.3.8 Infringe on any copyright, trademark, patent or other intellectual property rights, including copying and/or using software, images, music, movies, or other intellectual property;