

**Effective Date:** 12/1/08**POLICY****Cancels:** Res. 062267**Approved by:** BOCC**See Also:** POL-005-IS; POL-1500-HR**Res. # 068879**

POL-0408-HR

OVERSEEING COUNTY E-MAIL AND  
INTERNET SYSTEMS

Unless otherwise stated in a union contract, this policy applies to all Whitman County employees and authorized agents.

**Definitions**

**E-mail:** Electronic mail. Messages and attachments sent from one computer to another via an electronic system.

**Internet:** Thousands of interconnected electronic networks.

**User:** Anyone who is authorized to use an e-mail account or access the internet via Whitman County property.

**1. Whitman County Encourages the Use of County Computer Equipment.**

Whitman County encourages the efficient and effective use of county computer equipment. It recognizes that the computer is a necessary tool for receiving and sending vital information in county business. In doing so, the county expects all internet and e-mail users to exercise common sense and discretion.

It also realizes that email and internet use has the potential to be abused. Therefore, Whitman County hopes to eliminate that abuse with the use of this policy.

**2. Web Email is Available.**

At the discretion of the Department Head/Elected Official, employees may be given access to web email through Information Services. Web email, although not always used through a county computer, is subject to all laws and policies pertaining to email use through county equipment. This includes, but may not be limited to, all policies, procedures and laws concerning email use, security, privacy and public disclosure.

**3. The Information Services Director, Other Department Heads and Elected Officials are Responsible for County Electronic Systems.**

The Information Services Director is responsible for the operation and maintenance of the County's electronic information system. This includes use of the internet and e-mail.

Department Heads/Elected Officials are responsible for the oversight and enforcement of this policy.

**4. E-Mail and Internet Access is for Business Purposes Only.**

E-mail and internet access is to be used for business purposes only. As such, it should be retained and treated as any other county record.

It is not uncommon for employees/agents to receive personal e-mails or occasionally look up personal sites on the internet. However, this practice must be kept to a minimum, be within legal regulations and not violate any part of this policy. Furthermore, employees should not be exploring personal internet sites where the public can view them doing so. Personal use of the internet and/or e-mail must be approved by the Department Head/Elected Official.

Employees shall not stream audio or video for non-work related purposes.

**5. County Computers are County Property.**

All county computers and their contents are the property of Whitman County. Therefore, all files sent via e-mail and downloaded from the internet or any other source are also the county's property.

It should be remembered that e-mail may be disclosed through public disclosure laws and rules of discovery in the case of a lawsuit. Confidentiality cannot be expected, except in the case of medical/legally confidential or privileged information. Users should not send highly sensitive, confidential or privileged material through the e-mail or internet.

Due to retention laws, Information Services strives to retain all emails for three years. All emails requiring retention longer than three years, such as public disclosure requests and data specific to each department, are the responsibility of the Department Head/Elected Official in accordance with RCW 40.14.010.

**6. Computers are Subject to Monitoring.**

An employee's/agent's rights while using county computers do not include privacy. Whitman County reserves the right to monitor, in any way, the computer activities of the employee/agent. It is the Department Head/Elected Official's responsibility to oversee e-mail and internet monitoring.

Furthermore, by using the county's computer, e-mail system, internet access and other equipment, the employee/agent knowingly and voluntarily consents to and acknowledges Whitman County's right to monitor its property.

Department Heads/Elected Officials may review computer content, internet histories and/or e-mail at any time. They may do so at the individual computer station or through the county's networking system. Information Services may perform monitoring if requested in writing by the Department Head/Elected Official. Human Resources may request the monitoring of an employee's computer if reasonable suspicion of a violation exists. The reasoning for such a request must be documented and may only be made if, after being notified of the suspicion, the Department Head/Elected Official refuses to investigate the allegations within thirty calendar days.

If, during the course of their duties, Information Services' employees discover questionable activity on an employee's/agent's computer, they shall immediately report the activity to the Information Services Director. The Director shall then contact the Department Head/Elected Official.

It is important to understand deleting an internet file from your computer does not necessarily mean it has been deleted from the system.

**7. Whitman County Prohibits Certain Uses of the Internet and/or Email.**

The following are internet and/or e-mail uses specifically prohibited by Whitman County:

- Commercial use: unless it is a core function of the department, any form of commercial use to benefit an individual or organization other than Whitman County.
- Copyright Violations: any use that violates copyright laws.
- Solicitation: the purchase or sale of personal items in violation of the county's solicitation policies.
- Harassment: any use that harasses, retaliates or discriminates against employees, vendors, customers and any other individuals.
- Downloading or uploading files or programs without the permission of the Department Head/Elected Official and Information Services. Files from the internet, or any other outside source, may contain a virus and must be scanned by virus detection software prior to use. The installation of programs shall be coordinated with Information Services.
- Viewing, distributing or downloading offensive or sexually explicit material: this includes, but is not limited to, pornographic material.
- Inappropriate language: includes obscenity, vulgarity, profanity or name-calling. It may also include expressions of ill will against individuals or groups.
- Politics: use for political purposes.
- Misrepresentation: the use of aliases is prohibited. Whitman County also prohibits the misrepresentation of an employee, a job description or county position.
- Misinformation/Confidential Information: the release of untrue and or confidential information regarding county business. This includes accessing, viewing or forwarding confidential information unless the user has the same privilege or confidence or has obtained permission from the original sender.
- Viewing/Downloading Non-Business Related Information without the permission of the Department Head/Elected Official: this includes viewing, downloading or any other method for retrieving non-County related information.
- Hacking or spamming.

- Streaming audio or video for non-work related purposes.

**8. Large Attachments Should be Avoided.**

Large e-mail attachments (over five megabyte) should be avoided. Other means of communicating the information should be used.

**9. Security is Vital.**

It is the responsibility of each e-mail and/or internet user to maintain a degree of security. For this reason, security features should be updated regularly.

Computer and e-mail passwords shall be changed at least once per year. They must also be changed in the event of employee turnover, a change in software, a breach of privacy or any other event that would put confidential information at risk. Passwords shall be at least eight characters in length and consist of a combination of upper and lower case letters, numbers and at least one special character (i.e. exclamation point, @ sign, etc.). They shall not contain any part of the employee's username or full name. Employees/agents should not share their password with others or access another's e-mail except when authorized by the Department Head/Elected Official. Nor should passwords be stored where unauthorized individuals may easily access the information (i.e. under keyboards, on the front of monitors, etc.).

Passwords shall be reported to the Department Head/Elected Official or his/her designee. That individual shall store those passwords in a secure, confidential location. The Department Head/Elected Official and designee shall be the only individuals with access to the password record.

**10. Violations of This Policy are Subject to Discipline.**

Violation of policy regarding internet and/or e-mail use may result in discipline up to and including termination. Violations shall be immediately reported to the appropriate Department Head/Elected Official or Human Resources.

Furthermore, internet and/or e-mail access may be removed from any employee due to violations of this policy as determined by the appropriate Department Head/Elected Official.

Contractors, consultants or other authorized agents who violate this policy may be banned from e-mail/internet use. Their contracts may be terminated as well.

Whitman County reserves the right to bring legal action for misuse of its e-mail and/or internet system.