

CAL FIRE Social Media Posting Guidelines for the Field



May 1, 2014

Information Release

Releasing information on social media sites like twitter should be treated no differently than any other information release to the media or public (i.e. news releases, incident update sheets or interviews). All information must have the appropriate level of approval prior to release as stated in Handbook 0600, 0691.3.

Common Posting Topics

- News release headlines
- Event information
- Incident information
- Fire prevention or life safety messages

Posting Content

Content included in social media posts should reflect the same standards as that of a news release. While users of social media often use shorthand and incomplete sentences, CAL FIRE's posts should remain professional and use good grammar. Avoid using abbreviations, codes or fire service jargon that may be unfamiliar to the general public. Reposting or "retweeting" other posts is fine, as long as the information is sourced, relates to the goals and mission of CAL FIRE, and is provided by an official account of a cooperator.

Posting Multimedia

Posting photos and short videos is allowed, but PIOs must ensure that all safety and information release policies, as well as privacy laws are followed. All multimedia should show the department and its personnel in a positive image. Here are a few examples that must be followed:

- All firefighters are wearing appropriate PPE and safety gear
- No identification of patients (faces, names, license plates, etc)
- Photos of minors must be taken in a public location or with parental permission

Photos should include a brief description. For more refer to Handbook 0600, 0691.4.

Incident Posting Template

It's important that the public see consistency on Department approved social media sites. While the type of incident, location and specifics may change, the format should not.

Initial Post PLEASE NOTE: Butte County does not need to insert county name

Template: Firefighters at scene of a incident type on insert exact location in insert city or geographical location (insert county name County). #IncidentName

Example: Firefighters at scene of a Residential Structure Fire on 4700 block of Elm Ave in Coalinga (Fresno County). #ElmFire

Example: Firefighters at scene of a Mass Casualty Incident on Hwy 65 & Sunset Ave in Lincoln (Placer County). #HwyMCI

Note: If the incident has been contained or cleared prior to the Initial Post then replace the words "at scene of" with "responded to".

Example: Firefighters responded to a Residential Structure Fire on 4700 block of Elm Ave in Coalinga (Fresno County). #ElmFire

Update Post

Template: #IncidentName [update] at insert exact location in insert city or geographical location (insert county name County) updated information.

Example: #ElmFire [update] on 4700 block of Elm Ave in Coalinga (Fresno County) is contained to single room. All occupants out safe.

Example: #HwyMCI [update] on Hwy 65 & Sunset Ave in Lincoln (Placer County) 15 vehicles involved & 20 patients being treated. Hwy 65 closed.

Final Post

Template: #IncidentName [final] at insert exact location in insert city or geographical location (insert county name County) updated information.

Example: #ElmFire [final] on 4700 block of Elm Ave in Coalinga (Fresno County) is now fully contained. Firefighters remain at scene mopping up.

Example: #HwyMCI [final] on Hwy 65 & Sunset Ave in Lincoln (Placer County) all patients have been transported or released. Hwy 65 is reopened.

Wildfire posting Template:

Template: Firefighters are battling a X acre fire at insert exact location in insert city or geographical location (insert county name County). #FireNameFire

Example: Firefighters are battling a 25 acre fire at San Gorgonio Ave & Old Idyllwild Rd in Banning (Riverside County). #GorgonioFire

Update:

Template: #FireNameFire [update] at insert exact location in insert city or geographical location (insert county name County) is now X acres and X% contained.

Example: #GorgonioFire [update] at San Gorgonio Ave & Old Idyllwild Rd in Banning (Riverside County) is now 50 acres and 30% contained.

Final:

Template: #FireNameFire [final] at insert exact location in insert city or geographical location (insert county name County) is now 100% contained at X acres.

Example: #GorgonioFire [update] at San Gorgonio Ave & Old Idyllwild Rd in Banning (Riverside County) is now 100% contained at 75 acres.

Posting Notes:

Exact Locations - If there are not enough characters in an update or final post, remove the exact location and use the geographic location only.

County Name – If your account or Unit only covers one county and the county name is in your twitter username, then county name can be left out of incident postings.

Addresses – It is recommended to always use address block numbers rather than a specific address for all incidents. Regardless, the exact address for a medical aid including traffic collisions should never be used. i.e 1400 block of Main St instead of 1423 Main St.

Abbreviations - Only use abbreviations that are widely known to the general public. Common abbreviations include Rd for Road, Hwy for Highway, St for Street, Co for County.

Wildfire Incident Posting

The CAL FIRE Website remains the main source and distribution point of wildfire information for fires burning in State Responsibility Areas. Unit approved social media sites can post information and pictures, but must first ensure coordination with the Communications Office. Posts on social media sites should provide links back to the incident's webpage on the CAL FIRE website.

Prescribed Burn Notification

Social Media is a good way to notify the public of vegetation management program burns like prescribed burns or hazard reduction pile burning. If room doesn't allow remove the line "Smoke will be visible".

Template: Firefighters are conducting a X acre prescribed burn near insert location (insert county name County) insert time. Smoke will be visible.

Example: Firefighters are conducting a 50 acre prescribed burn near Summit Rd in Mt Diablo State Park (Contra Costa County) today. Smoke will be visible.

Releasing Patient Information

Releasing information on the condition of patients requires a careful balance to ensure patient privacy is not violated. A patient's name, age and identifiable characteristics are not releasable. Information personnel may disclose the condition of a patient in general terms that do not provide specific medical information.

The following condition definitions should be used:

- **Undetermined** – The patient is awaiting medical assessment.
- **Good** – The patient's vital signs are stable and within normal ranges. The patient is conscious and recovery indicators are excellent.
- **Fair** – The patient's vital signs are stable and within normal ranges. The patient is conscious, but may be uncomfortable. Recovery indicators are favorable.
- **Serious** – The patient's vital signs may be unstable and are not within normal ranges. The patient is acutely ill. Recovery indicators are questionable.
- **Critical** – The patient's vital signs are unstable and not within normal ranges. The patient may be unconscious and recovery indicators are unfavorable.
- **Deceased** – The patient is dead.

These terms are the only appropriate description of a patient's medical condition. Even the term "stable" could be a violation and should not be used. State and federal medical privacy protection continues to apply even after the death of the patient.