



Think Before You Post: 6 Considerations For Safety & Health Professionals

BY ANNE-MARIE MITCHELL, ESQ.

Establishing a social media presence is now considered a common and often necessary way to communicate on almost any safety and health topic imaginable. While communicating information via the use of electronic newsletters, blogs and other social media has exploded in popularity, safety and health professionals in both the public and private sector should remain mindful of the message. Whether you are a seasoned on-line communicator or just thinking of getting started, consider the following questions before you post:

1. Does the post discuss an individual or business by name; or discuss an ongoing legal proceeding or investigation?

When publicly posting information that identifies an individual or business by name, professionals should always consider whether there are any privacy issues or concerns before posting. Public postings should never reveal confidential, sensitive or personal information about a person, organization or pending legal case without prior consent. It is usually permissible, however, to post general statements regarding facts or matters contained in public records.

2. Can the post be considered an advertisement for professional services?

A post on safety and health issues that also serves the purpose of professional advertising may be highly desirable for a private sector organization. However, that same posting may run afoul of strict ethical guidelines if made by an employee of a government or public sector organization. While it's good practice to check and become familiar with your employer's specific policies and procedures, a professional posting regarding safety and health issues that does not directly communicate your availability for outside professional employment is unlikely to be considered advertising.

3. Does the post discuss both sides of the issue?

Safety and health professionals may have a tendency to present only their organization's side of the story. However, for your professional opinion to be truly valued, it's important to remember to provide unbiased information and present both or many sides of an issue.

4. Should the post include a disclaimer?

Consider using an appropriate disclaimer particularly when a communication could create unjustified expectations or mislead the public. Additionally, many government and public sector organizations have specific rules about posting opinions that do not reflect the organization's viewpoints, and they may require professionals to include a disclaimer on any postings to that effect.

5. Do you announce any specialties or expertise?

Safety and health professionals often specialize in certain fields related to the services provided by the organization they work for. On-line postings can be a useful way for these safety and health professionals to reach others interested in that field and share valuable experiences and insight. So long as it's not a false or misleading statement, it's usually reasonable for the safety professional to claim specialization or expertise in his or her field of work.

6. Does the post allow for reader comments?

Many on-line posts and platforms promote discourse among readers by allowing readers to post comments that are publicly displayed on the site. Sometimes these comments can be inflammatory or provide mis-information. Safety and health professionals should use good judgement in choosing if and how they respond to comments.

An on-line posting provides a special opportunity to establish oneself as a trusted and knowledgeable safety and health professional. As with all endeavors, you should consider applicable professional guidelines and regulations as well as your employer's specific policies and procedures. With these six considerations in mind, on-line postings can be a part of a successful and ethical professional development tool, as well as provide a valuable on-line resource for safety and health professionals.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Anne-Marie Mitchell is a graduate of the University of Chicago Law School. She practices commercial litigation at Kelley Drye & Warren LLP in New York City. She can be reached at amitchell@kelleydrye.com

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