General Order

Houston Police Department

ISSUE DATE:	NO.
March 26, 2021	200-14

REFERENCE: Supersedes all prior conflicting Circulars and Directives, and General Order 200-14, dated September 25, 2020

SUBJECT: TELEPHONE REGULATIONS

POLICY

All communications on City-owned telephones shall be conducted in an appropriate and professional manner. Employees shall be polite, civil, and orderly, treating all persons with dignity and respect.

The City of Houston's telephone service and cellular telephones are to be used to assist employees in performing their assigned duties.

This General Order applies to all employees.

1 CITY-OWNED CELLULAR TELEPHONES

Employees shall be aware that all cellular telephone calls, text messages, emails, and other communications may be subject to discovery in criminal or civil matters, may be subject to release to a member of the public in response to a public information request under the Texas Public Information Act, or may be used in internal investigations. Employees should consider these communications a public record and shall have no expectation of privacy.

The department reserves the right to access any information on City-owned cellular telephones at any time.

Response

Employees issued a City-owned cellular telephone shall ensure the device is operational (i.e., capable of sending and receiving voice, text, and data) and in their possession at all times while on duty or working police related extra employment.

a. On-duty non-exempt employees shall respond to any departmental telephone calls, text messages, and voicemails which require a response, as soon as practicable.

b. Off-duty non-exempt employees shall respond to departmental telephone calls, text messages, and voicemails once they return to work. Employees are not expected to have the cellular telephone turned on while off-duty, unless a job-related telephone call is expected (e.g., a telephone call from the district attorney's [DA's] office after an arrest or when the employee is on-call).

c. Exempt employees shall respond to any departmental telephone calls, text messages, and voicemails which require a response, as soon as practicable.

d. All employees shall respond to departmental telephone calls, text messages, and voicemails regarding emergency call-ups or deployment upon notification or as soon as practicable.

Use

When using City-owned cellular telephones, employees shall be governed by the following:

a. Usage should be for conducting City business. Personal use is permitted, but should be minimized and all usage must comply with applicable departmental policies.

b. Employees may give their City-owned assigned cellular telephone number to citizens, department employees, and other law enforcement partners (e.g., Harris County Sheriff's Office [HCSO], DA's office).

c. Employees shall adhere to State law and City ordinances governing use of cellular telephones while driving. When available, employees are encouraged to use hands-free technology to make or receive calls and text messages while operating a vehicle.

d. Employees may utilize the cellular telephone to assist in an investigation, however, employees shall not delete any items of evidentiary value (e.g., photographs, video, text messages) from the cellular telephone until the evidence has been properly processed according to General Order 700-01, **Property and Evidence Control Regulations** and the transmission of such evidence has been verified.

e. Employees shall ensure cellular telephones receive factory updates as needed.

Restrictions

Employees shall adhere to the following restrictions:

a. Cellular telephones shall not be "jail-broken," "rooted," or modified in any way without prior written approval from the Deputy Director of the Office of Technology Services.

b. Employees shall not bypass or disable any of the security features without the prior written approval from the Deputy Director of the Office of Technology Services.

c. Criminal Justice Information (CJI) and Police Department operational data shall not be stored in "cloud" based storage resources accessed by cellular telephones (e.g., DropBox, Apple iCloud, Amazon Cloud Drive, Google Drive) without prior written approval from the Deputy Director of the Office of Technology Services.

d. Employees shall not install or attempt to install software applications ("apps") on their cellular telephone from any source, unless it is approved through the chain of command up to the executive assistant chief. The Office of Technology Services will keep a list of apps that have been approved.

e. Cellular telephones shall not be used to take or send inappropriate photographic or video images, emails, or text messages unless they can be clearly linked to official police business.

f. Cellular telephones and accessories shall not be reassigned or loaned to another person. Any new issues or reassignments of cellular telephones shall be completed through the department's Office of Technology Services.

g. All service and repair of City-issued cellular telephones shall be performed by the department's Office of Technology Services. Employees shall not make any attempt to repair a cellular telephone or use a third party service to perform repairs.

Acquisition of Cellular Telephones

Any request to acquire a City-owned cellular telephone shall include, but is not limited to, the type of device requested and a justification for the requested device. The request shall be sent via email through the employee's chain of command: divisional technology coordinator, division commander, assistant chief, and executive assistant chief. If approved, the executive assistant chief's office shall forward the email request to the Office of Technology Services utilizing TSC.Technologyservicesrequest@houstonpolice.org.

Authorized purchases or leases of such devices shall be handled the same as any other acquisition.

Damage or Loss

Employees shall make all reasonable attempts to prevent loss, theft, and breakage of the cellular telephone and accessories. If the cellular telephone and/or accessories are broken, stolen, or lost due to negligence the employee may be held responsible for replacement or repair cost.

Incidents involving the loss, damage, destruction, misuse, or compromise of any cellular telephone shall be immediately reported to the employee's immediate supervisor and the Office of Technology Services. The incident shall be investigated as indicated in General Order 400-18, **Responsibility for City Property**.

2 LONG-DISTANCE CALLS AND INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

Network Based

Employees shall use City of Houston long-distance service only to conduct official City business. The misuse of the City of Houston's long-distance telephone service shall be reported and investigated in accordance with General Order 400-18, **Responsibility for City Property**.

International Travel

Employees shall not use the department cellular telephone when traveling outside of the United States, unless the travel is for City business. When use of the cellular telephone may be necessary outside of the United States, the employee shall contact the Office of Technology Services at least 7 days prior to travel to acquire an international rate plan.

Non-Network

Employees may seek reimbursement for long-distance charges, but only when the communication was necessary to conduct official City business and one of the following circumstances existed:

a. The employee was outside the City network local access zone.

b. The officer was on an undercover police investigation and use of the City provided long distance service would have compromised the investigation.

3 COLLECT CALLS

With the exception of the Command Center, no employee shall accept collect calls. If a person attempts to place a collect call to any department telephone, the employee receiving the call shall do one of the following in the order listed:

a. Ask the operator to have the caller use a department toll free number.

b. Ask the operator to obtain a telephone number from the caller so the call may be returned.

c. Ask the operator to have the caller place the collect call to the Command Center.

4 TELEPHONE NUMBERS

In accordance with General Order 200-08, **Conduct and Authority**, all employees shall register their department cellular telephone number with the department through the Personal Data Adjuster. Supervisors shall update changes using the Personal Data Adjuster program.

The Command Center shall maintain a current list of the most commonly used department telephone numbers, fax numbers, and toll free numbers.

It is the responsibility of each division commander and each Executive Staff member to inform the Command Center of any telephone number updates.

Art Acevedo
Chief of Police