UNISON Guide to e-Safety at Work

UNISON has represented many members who have found themselves in disciplinary situations because of communications sent by electronic means. In some circumstances people have been dismissed for what they have said on an email or on social media.

Therefore UNISON has written this leaflet to help you avoid such situations. We want you to stay safe online. Why give your boss easy ammunition to dismiss you?

E-mails at Work

An enormous amount of communication in many workplaces is undertaken via e-mail. In a busy workplace it is easy to make mistakes when sending emails. It is easy to write something quickly that can be interpreted differently to what you meant to say. A request for something can be received as an instruction or order. Therefore it is advisable to always be courteous and use key words such as "please" and "thank you".

Remember that e-mails are permanent records and your employer can retrieve them even after you delete them. You also need to be aware that your employer has the legal right to monitor all emails from workplace addresses. Plus e-mails can be made a subject of a Freedom of Information request. Here is a quick list of 'Do's' and 'Don'ts'.

- **Do not** write anything that could embarrass you or your employer.
- **Do not** be rude or use rude words.
- **Do not** criticise individuals in a personal manner.
- **Do not** refer to behaviour that may be deemed inappropriate in the workplace.
- **Do not** criticise your boss – they may find out!
- **Do not** think your emails are private – they can be passed on.
- **Do** view your communication as public. Consider if you could justify your communication if it was printed in the local newspaper.
- **Do** always be polite and courteous.

- **Do** consider how the recipient/s will read it. They cannot see your face or tone of voice when you write.
- **Do** consider whether e-mail is the best method of communication. If the message is of a sensitive or personal nature is it best communicated face to face or in a private letter?

Private E-Mails

If you refer to work in a private e-mail from your private e-mail address it could still cause you difficulties at work. What you consider a private message can easily become public if it is shared at work.

Who you think is a friend at work may pass your message onto somebody who isn't.

It is advisable to avoid talking about work from your private email address if you can. If not you need to follow the same guidelines as outlined in the 'E-mails at Work' section.

Data Protection

Often communications we send out for work can contain personal or sensitive information that if received in the wrong hands could result in the sender breaking the Data Protection Act.

Employers can be fined for breaking the Data Protection Act which has resulted in organisations disciplining their workers when there are Data Protection breaches.

In a busy pressurised workplace it is easy to send communication to the wrong person/s in error. These errors can cause great stress and anxiety for workers being investigated. It is an error the most professional and dedicated of individuals can easily make. Such a breach of the Data Protection Act can occur by simply clicking on a wrong person when sending an e-mail. Instead of your message going to 'Dave Smith' the Director, you can easily click 'David Smith', who happens to be the local newspaper reporter. Therefore we recommend that despite the pressure to undertake work quickly:-

- You should always double check your recipients before sending a message.
- Consider the safest form of communication given the information to be sent.
- Can documents be password protected to minimise potential data loss?