

Perils of the Electronic World

The use of the computer, tablets, and cellphones are part of the work culture today. Pilots use tablets in the cockpit, maintenance employers manage inventory on their laptops, and employees communicate directly with cellphones. Some employers even use email to manage their overtime rolls. Employer memos are sent by text or email and company documents including rules are available on their intranet servers.

All of these communication and data management systems work at lightning speed but the rules governing their use are still evolving. That is why there is a big problem. Much of labor relations is still operating in the 20th century and so are some of our habits.

Because we use all of these systems in our private lives, we may think nothing of their use in the workplace. In some cases, it makes our work easier. For example, we need to reach a baggage handler on the ramp so we text her. Or there is a delay on our bus route, so we pick up the cellphone to alert a driver on that run. Or we need to send a union document to our workgroup in the office, so we log on to the company server, attach the file, and send.

So here are some sobering statistics. According to a recent study, 65 percent of employers monitor worker Internet connections. More than 25 percent of employers have fired workers for misusing

email and 30 percent have fired workers for misusing the Internet.

The operative word here for all workers is "don't." We may be able to cite a court case or an NLRB decision that might favor protection of our rights in the workplace on this issue. But the safest strategy is to take all necessary precautions to protect our members and ourselves.

When we use email or texts on an employer's computer, we are not guaranteed any rights of privacy. Many companies monitor through sophisticated software, store, and review email on a regular basis. What you create or simply forward may be read by the boss. And don't think that the delete button can save you. Employers can dig up deleted email off the hard drive and discipline the authors of the email.

This case should sober us all up about email use. Not so long ago, Dow Chemical fired 50 workers and suspended 200 others for sending and storing emails that included materials ranging from swimsuit photos to hard-core pornography and violent images. Those disciplined included union members and supervisors.

Companies have covered their liability by including language in their rulebooks on electronic media use, including the use of personal cellphones on their property. While labor law questions dealing with these issues are slowly

being resolved through the NLRB and courts, none of our members should put themselves at risk.

So here's some basic advice about using company computers:

- Do not conduct union business on company computers unless the local union has an agreement with the employer as to the type of labor-management activity that the computer can be used for. If, for example, a local has an agreement about filing grievances electronically, that should be the extent of using company computers for union business. Remember, you cannot be sure of what will end up on company servers for the boss to see.
- Local unions should have complete control over any communication that is used for union business. Some of our locals have generated email accounts and member-only access pages for these purposes. Contact the International's IT Department if you need help.
- Your password does not guarantee privacy against employer monitoring.
- Assume someone else will read any email you send on a company computer.
- Labeling email private and confidential does not guarantee it will be treated as such.
- Do not transmit anything offensive or view anything offensive you receive.
- Surf the Web at home, not on the job.
- Play it safe. Do not use company computers for personal business, period.
- Understand all company policies on the use of electronic media.



TWU History

In April 1968 TWU Local 1400 signed its first contract with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.



Today, TWU represents a variety of workers at PANY/NJ facilities including airport, tunnel and bridge personnel, toll collectors, information service agents, security officers, and food service workers.

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