

E-Mail and Geese and Golf Courses

You might wonder what these three items in the subject line have to do with each other?

It seems that officials at Langley AFB here in Virginia trapped and slaughtered 189 geese. Why did they do such a terrible thing? Because of safety... the officials were concerned about their high performance aircraft sucking one of these birds into the intake and crashing. Sounds reasonable, doesn't it?

Well, it seems that a local newspaper FOIA'd all the e-mail traffic that dealt with the geese issue over the last two years. Guess what all these e-mails talked about? Every one of them expressed concern as to how they messed up the golf course! Guess what NONE of them talked about? You guessed it... not a one discussed flight safety. Guess who were never part of the e-mail traffic? This should be easy -- that's right, none of the safety officials were even copy furnished!

An abject lesson concerning e-mail... a lesson that goes well beyond the ethical issues on the use of Government resources! E-Mails are records, official records, and subject to FOIA. I bet that all those that participated in the dialogue concerning geese on the golf course thought that they were "deleted." When old and stale e-mail shows up a year or two later and are examined in the harsh light of day, without the benefit of any context, the result can be might embarrassing, or worse!

I suggest that this is a good example for emphasizing with your clients the importance of restrained use of the official e-mail system. It is not just "private" conversation that all goes away when we hit the "delete" key.

Don't forget that I have an outstanding training video on the proper (and improper) use of e-mail. To date, only one MSC has requested to borrow it. It is entitled "e-mail essentials -- Legal & Appropriate Use of e-mail". Let me know if you want to borrow it.

If you want to read the article, it is at this URL:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/local/feed/a30462-1999aug23.htm>

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P.S. Thanks to MAJ Mike Stump who brought this article to my attention.