CLOVER SAFE

AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

#83

SAFETY TIPS FOR COMPUTER SOCIAL NETWORKING

Clover Safe notes are intended primarily for 4-H volunteers and members nine years and older.

With expanding use of computers and the internet, a new tool known to many as social networking has become popular. Social networking provides new opportunities for people to communicate and share ideas. At the same time, social networking may also allow unrestricted access, by unknown and potentially harmful people, to information about yourself and those you communicate with. To protect yourself and others the Federal Trade Commission urges, "don't post information about yourself online that you don't want the whole world to know." The federal law known as the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act strictly limits the personal information commercial web sites may collect from users under the age of 13 years and most social networking sites (MySpace, Facebook, etc.) restrict usage to those 13 years and older. The following tips are provided to assist in keeping you and your information safe.

Safety Tips for Computer Social Networking

- Before joining a social network site carefully consider how it works, with particular regard to the site's security procedures and who is allowed to view postings.
- Always retain control over the information you post online by restricting access to your page to a select group of people you know, such as your friends from school or family.
- Keep personal information to yourself. Never post your full name, Social Security number, address, phone number, or bank and credit card account number. The same goes for posting other people's personal information.
- Purposefully keep your screen name vague or anonymous to prevent strangers from determining who you are and where you can be found. Similarly, do not post information about specific times or places where you will be going.
- Post only information that you are comfortable with others seeing and knowing about you. Many people will view your page, including parents, teachers, coaches, and employers.
- Remember that once you post information online, it cannot be retracted.
- Carefully consider whether to post your photo. It may be downloaded, altered, and re-posted or used elsewhere.
- Never get together in person with someone you have "met" online unless you are certain of their actual identity. Talk it over with your parent or guardian first.
- If you receive an email or text message that makes you feel uncomfortable, do not respond to it. Instead, show it to a parent or guardian.
- When sending emails to a group of people, it is a prudent safety practice to blind copy (bcc) other people to whom you would like to send the email. In this way, the other email addresses are not visible to each recipient and are protected if the original email is later forwarded.
- Do not assume that a message is really from who it says it's from. If you suspect that a message is fake, use another method to contact the person to find out. This includes invitations to join new social networks.
- Always type the address of your social networking site directly into your browser or use your personal bookmarks. If you link to your social networking site through email or another internet site, you may be entering your account name and password into a false site where your personal information could be stolen.
- In order to prevent unscrupulous persons from using applications to steal your personal information, take the same safety precautions that you would with any other program or file you download from the internet when dealing with third-party applications for your social network site.
- Avoid giving away the email addresses of your friends to unknown persons and never allow social networking services to scan your email address book.
- Be careful about clicking on links that you receive in emails and messages on your social network site.

Portions of this Clover Safe Note are modified from information given in Federal Trade Commission document entitled "Social Networking Sites: Safety Tips for Tweens and Teens" available online at: http://ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/tech/tec14.shtm and Microsoft Corporation document entitled "10 tips for social networking safety" available online at: http://www.microsoft.com/protect/yourself/phishing/socialnet.msxp.