

General Operating Guideline

NO. 08.10.03

Approved By: Phil Welch

Effective Date: June 8, 2018

Rescinds: _____

Subject: **TATTOO, BODY MARKING, BODY PIERCING, AND
MUTILATION POLICY**

I. PURPOSE

This Policy states the Gastonia Fire Department's procedure and standards on Tattoos and Body Markings, which applies to all current/potential members. This Policy ensures our workforce presents a sharp, professional appearance to the public while also allowing individual expression through authorized body art that is consistent with the values of the Gastonia Fire Department.

II. PROCEDURE

- A. No tattoo or brand, of any type, is authorized on the head, face (including inside the mouth), neck, or hands, except as described below.
1. **Neck/Chest.** The collar of the Dark Blue/White Uniform T-shirt serves as the reference point for the back and sides of the neck. No tattoo or brand may be visible above the collar on the neck.
 2. **Hands.** Tattoos or brands must not be below the wrist. A single tattoo in the form of a ring is authorized on the wearer's finger (not thumb); one tattoo per hand. The tattoo(s) will not extend past the knuckle or first joint of the finger and should be in good taste.
 3. **Head/Face.** Permanent eyeliner makeup in the form of cosmetic tattooing is authorized for female members. If worn, permanent eyeliner will be conservative, in good taste, and complementary to the wearer's complexion and the uniform. The tattoo(s) must not be brightly colored, must not be more than 1/8 inch width, and must not extend past the outer corner of the eye. No other permanent makeup is authorized.
- B. **CONTENT.** Tattoos or brands anywhere on the body that promote racism/discrimination, indecency, extremist or supremacist philosophies, lawlessness, violence, or contain sexually explicit material are prohibited

1. Racist or discriminatory tattoos or brands are those that advocate the degradation of people based on race, ethnicity, national origin, or gender.
2. Indecent or sexually explicit tattoos or brands are those that contain a visual image, the dominant theme of which depicts or promotes graphic nudity, including sexual activities or organs, in a lustful way. Tattoos featuring fully exposed nudity are prohibited.
3. Extremist tattoos or brands are those that depict or promote extremist activities or organizations that advocate hatred, intolerance, or lawlessness (e.g., terrorist groups, neo-Nazis, skinheads, outlaw gangs, extreme political organizations with violent histories). Because some extremist/criminal groups and organizations exploit popular symbols (e.g., cartoon characters), care must be taken in evaluating such tattoos or brands so as not to implicate members who may have selected the tattoo or brand based on its artistic value rather than a hidden meaning. In these cases, a determination will be made based on the totality of thematic elements expressed by tattoos or brands elsewhere on the body.
4. Tattoos or brands labeled violent or promoting lawlessness are those that depict extreme graphic violence, profanity, glorifications of drug culture, or markings that can reasonably be interpreted as anti-government in nature.

C. **COVERAGE OF AREA**

1. In the case of tattoos, members are authorized tattoos with no limitation on size or percentage of coverage subject to location and content restrictions listed above in paragraphs A and B.
2. In the case of branding, no more than one brand, not to exceed 4" x 4", is authorized subject to location and content restrictions listed above in paragraphs A and B.

D. **TATTOO INK.** Ultraviolet (UV) or black light tattoos are made with a special ink that is typically only visible under ultraviolet light. UV tattoos must be treated the same as those applied with typical ink and colors.

E. **BODY PIERCING.**

1. All Operations/Life Safety (Uniformed) members are prohibited from wearing earrings or any other body piercings while on duty.

F. **BODY MUTILATION OR MODIFICATION.** Other forms of intentional body mutilation or modification are not authorized; examples include, scarring, excessive ear piercing/stretching, tongue splitting, beneath the skin decorative implants, decorative tooth plating/engraving, etc. This prohibition does not include traditional elective medical procedures, such as, teeth straightening, breast augmentation, cosmetic plastic surgery, etc.

G. DISQUALIFYING TATTOOS, BRANDS, PIERCINGS, OR MUTILATIONS.

1. Applicants seeking employment that have prohibited tattoos, brands, or mutilations as outlined above will not be considered for employment. Affected applicants who choose to either alter or remove a disqualifying tattoo, brand, or mutilation may be reconsidered at a later date.
2. Violation of this policy is considered a Class A offense. Any member that intentionally violates this Policy will face disciplinary action up to termination.
3. Any member who desires a new tattoo or brand and has any question as to the compliance with this policy should seek guidance through the chain of command.