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Important Reminder: Copyright Compliance for EMG Associations

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Dear EMG Agents/Coordinators,

It has come to our attention that two EMG Associations recently received cease-and-desist notices regarding unauthorized use of images on their websites. With the rise of AI-powered tools, it has become significantly easier for intellectual property holders to detect copyright violations. While these notices included demands for payment, the associations have not been required to pay at this time. However, both promptly removed the flagged images and conducted broader reviews to eliminate other potentially infringing content.

What is unauthorized image use? When someone takes a photo and posts it online, they retain the copyright for that image. We can't use copyrighted images without permission or a license (with the exception of [fair use](#)). **It does not matter if you provide a citation, reusing someone else's image on your own website, presentation, or otherwise is copyright infringement.** We may only use images that we own the copyright to (e.g. images we've taken or that have been sent to us with written permission of the copyright owner) or images that have been appropriately licensed for reuse (e.g., Creative Commons, public domain). There are many sources for such licensed images online, [a guide for doing so is available here](#).

As agents and coordinators of local EMG units, it is your responsibility to ensure that your EMG volunteers understand and adhere to copyright and attribution requirements in all aspects of their work. Please note that local Association websites, social media accounts, and virtually presented or recorded presentations are managed independently and are *not* covered under the VCE/VT legal umbrella. This means associations may be held legally liable for copyright violations, including fines and penalties.

To support compliance, the state EMG office strongly recommends the following actions:

- **Discuss this issue** with your EMG Associations and volunteers.
- **Share the resources below** with any EMGs involved in website management, social media, or presentations.
- **Encourage a full review** of existing images and presentation materials to ensure proper licensing and attribution.

The state office has provided multiple trainings on copyright and fair use over the years, including, most recently in sessions at last year's Leadership Development Training. We continue to make resources available on the [VA EMG website](#) to support your efforts. Once there, look for the **Communications** section, which includes:

Recommended Resources:

- [Introduction to EMG Social Media](#)
- [EMG Photography, Copyright, and Attribution Resources](#)
 - Includes media release forms (signed forms are kept in local office files)
 - Links to video training sessions done by VT CALS Librarian Inga Haugen and released in 2020 on copyright and attribution, including guidelines on sourcing appropriately licensed images. We commissioned Inga to produce this series in response to similar issues with stolen images prior to 2020. (4 videos total; approx. 63 minutes total)
- [Copyright Update for Agents \(VCE Intranet\)](#)

Examples of using images correctly/incorrectly:

✗ Copyright infringement: Volunteer x made an informational page on their association website. They did a google search for “children playing” and downloaded/uploaded the first photo that came up. The photo came from someone’s personal blog and was not licensed for reuse. They posted the picture, but also a link to the website it came from because they thought that’s all they needed to use it.

✓ What they should do: Volunteer x made an informational page on their association website. They wanted a photo of children playing and found one by searching on <https://openverse.org/> or an attribution free stock photo site like <https://pixabay.com/>. They reused the image according to the rules set out in the license (including appropriate attribution if required) and included license information in the caption for the image.

We ask that any questions from EMGs be addressed first by local agents and coordinators. If further assistance is needed, then agents and coordinators can reach out to the EMG state office directly.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and for helping ensure your programs remain compliant and protected.

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