

Public Information

CHAPTER 12.1

Issued:

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Submitted by:

Approved by: Chief of Fire Rescue

Introduction

It is policy of the Alachua County Fire/Rescue Department to establish and maintain a positive operating relationship with the news media.

This directive will establish a standard procedure to provide the news media with information normally requested from the fire department regarding fire, EMS, Emergency Management, and 911 Emergency Reporting information, to control the movements of the media personnel for safety reasons, and to establish an operating framework for Public Information that will effectively integrate into the overall fire ground management system.

Procedures

Availability

The Public Information Officer or his designated representative will be available on a twenty-four basis for the purpose of gathering and relaying pertinent information to Media personnel on any incident which has attracted such media attention.

Notification

Notification of all significant incidents will be made to the Public Information officer. This will be done on the following manner:

- A separate logon for the CAD system at CDC. This will allow designated personnel access to all information viable for news releases. The new logon is FIRE-PIO. Personnel assigned to the duty of PIO will have the needed password and training for obtaining information.
- A dedicated Fire/Rescue telephone news line will be established for media purposes. The audix line would contain a brief report of newsworthy incidents and a pager number to contact the designated Public Information Officer for further information. Information services will be responsible for upkeep of this line. The PIO will be responsible for the daily update of information.
- Fire dispatchers shall immediately notify the Public information Officer of any newsworthy incident via alphanumeric, or voice pager.
- Newsworthy incidents would include any of the following:

Accidental Deaths

Aircraft Alert 3/Fire

Animal Rescues	Arson Attempts/Arrest/Fire
Boat Accidents/Fires	Bombings
Drownings	Evacuations
EOC Activation's	Firefighter Injury/Death
Dept. Vehicle Accidents	Fuel Spills (Large)
Hazardous Material Incidents	Entrapment Responses
Mutual Aid Responses	Severe Weather Advisory
Structural Fires	Structural Collapse
Unusual Events	Train Accident/Fire
Vehicle Accident w/Death	

Guidelines for on-scene operation:

Command will be responsible for the management of the public information on the incident. As soon as practical, after basic rescue and fire operations are extended, Command will establish a Public Information Officer (PIO). The PIO Officer will relieve Command of the need to deal directly with the media during incidents. The PIO will provide standard information to the media in order to accurately report the situation.

The Department PIO will report to Command upon arrival on the fire ground, to determine the status of the PIO Assignment. The PIO will immediately assign or assume the function.

Prior to the arrival of the Public Information Officer, Command may assign an officer to the PIO function. The assigned officer will begin to gather information on the incident. The assigned officer will station himself in a readily visible and accessible location adjacent to the Command Post to meet with and provide information for media personnel.

Radio designation will be "PIO".

Individuals assigned to perform PIO functions should be regulated by the following general guidelines:

If possible, add anything to the basic information on the form that will enhance the story of the situation, such information might include:

- An extremely hazardous situation/rescue
- A person or company that did an outstanding job
- Citizen support

- Extra information that will make a better story for the reporters and tell the citizens how the fire department provides fire and/or EMS services.
- If possible, a personal interview with a Fire Officer, or crew member is encouraged. The interview should be related to the scene and only facts should be given. Fire officers and crews assigned to a specific task should not be interviewed until their jobs are complete.

Usually, during the time you are gathering information, you will have inquiries from reporters seeking information. Give them what you have at that point and emphasize that this information is tentative. If it gets to the point that questions from reporters are keeping you from gathering information, use these alternatives:

- Establish a designated area for all reporters to gather. Tell the reporters to standby in that location and that you will return shortly with more information.
- Request additional manpower from Command to utilize for assistance in gathering information and stay with the reporters.
- Tell the reporters to go ahead and get pictures and film footage without interfering with fire ground operations while you are gathering information. Make certain and point out the hazard zone. Arrange to meet them shortly at a location and give them facts.
- If they have deadlines to meet, get a phone number(s) where they can be reached and phone the facts to them as soon as possible.
- Verify that press line is being updated with information regarding the incident.
- **DO NOT** release names of persons injured or deceased until next of kin has been notified. Notification(s) is/are usually handled by the police and/or hospitals. Ask CDC supervisor to check with the police department or hospital to confirm that next of kin has been notified. **DO NOT USE NAMES OF DECEASED OR INJURED PERSONS OVER RADIO AT ANY TIME.**

The officer assigned to PIO may be required to escort media on an orientation tour of the scene. This must be cleared with Command and coordinated with operating and investigative officers before entering the area.

The PIO will be responsible for requiring that all media personnel maintain a safe distance from the operations on the scene.

If media personnel create a safety problem, or hinder operations, they should be removed in a positive manner – avoiding confrontations.

The Public Information Officer will have access to the Media Line which contacts all news agencies on a closed-loop telephone system.

Press Conferences/News Releases:

The Public Information Officer should be apprised of the need for all press conferences. The public Information Officer is responsible for notifying the media of when and where the press conference will be and what the conference pertains to.

At no time shall an officer/employee hold a press conference without direct approval from the Chief of Alachua County Fire/Rescue.

The decision to hold a press conference will be at the discretion of the Chief of the Alachua County Fire/Rescue Department, and/or the Public Information Officer.

Production/Public Relations:

The Public Information Officer is to be the liaison between any productions companies and Alachua County Fire/Rescue. The requests for production must be passed through the Public Information Office and approved by the Chief of Alachua County Fire/Rescue. If a production company requests a story on a specific incident, releases from the citizen(s) involved in the incident are a must.

All requests from the media shall be referred to a Chief Officer **or** if at incident, the Public Information Officer (PIO). Employees shall not comment to the media about any Departmental matters. Any employee contacted by the media concerning Departmental matters shall immediately make verbal contact, one to one communication, with their District Chief.

Taking photographs shall not be allowed within or at any County Station without prior approval of the Chief or designee.