




Clayton County Police Department PROCEDURES

Subject PUBLIC INFORMATION & MEDIA RELATIONS		Procedure # G2	
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I. PURPOSE

The Clayton County Police Department must have the support of the community to be successful. Establishing and maintaining an effective relationship with the news media is crucial to accomplishing this goal. The purpose of this procedure is to establish guidelines regarding media relations and the release and dissemination of public information through the news media.

II. POLICY

The Clayton County Police Department will cooperate fully and impartially with authorized news media representatives in their efforts to gather factual, public information relating to departmental activities, to the degree that it does not interfere with law enforcement operations. However, certain information will be withheld from the news media to protect the privacy of individuals and the constitutional rights of the accused, to avoid interference with a departmental investigation, or because it is legally privileged.

It is the policy of this Department and its employees to cooperate with representatives of the news media, whenever possible, in the release of information. Release of such information will be made without partiality and will not be withheld in favor of a particular agency or representative. Only known facts and not conjecture will be released to news media representatives, and only in line with departmental guidelines and applicable laws.

III. RESPONSIBILITY

A. Unless, otherwise directed by the Chief of Police, or authorized designee, the Support Services Division Commander, or the designated Public Information Officer (PIO) shall be responsible for the public information function of the Department. Hence, the Support Services Division Commander, and the designated PIO, shall have direct access to the Chief of Police, as it relates to the release of departmental information to the news media.

In the absence of the Chief of Police, Support Services Division Commander, or the designated PIO, the public release of information related to police matters will be handled as set forth in this policy.

- B. The Support Services Division Commander oversees the Department's Community Affairs/Public Information Unit and reports directly to the Deputy Chief of Police. The responsibilities of the Community Affairs/Public Information Unit shall include, but is not limited to, the following:
 - 1. Assisting the news media with covering routine news stories, and at the scenes of incidents;
 - 2. Being available for on-call responses to the news media;
 - 3. Preparing and distributing Department approved news or press releases, and maintaining records of such releases;
 - 4. Arranging for, and assisting with news or press conferences;
 - 5. Coordinating the release of information about victims, witnesses and suspects, when authorized;
 - 6. Assisting with critical incidents and crisis situations within the Department (e.g., officer-involved shootings, line of duty deaths);
 - 7. Coordinating the release of information concerning confidential departmental investigations and operations, when authorized;
 - 8. Managing and monitoring the Department's social media accounts; and
 - 9. Disseminating the public release of information pertaining to significant incidents and/or special events that involve departmental investigations and activities.

IV. NEWS MEDIA ACTIVITIES AT THE SCENE OF AN INCIDENT/EVENT

- A. News Media Activities Involving an Incident or Event
 - 1. Employees shall be respectful and courteous to news media representatives at all times.
 - 2. Employees will extend every courtesy to news media representatives and photographers who are actively covering an incident/event. These courtesies may permit closer scene access than that granted to the general public.
 - 3. Areas near a scene, may be designated for news vehicles and equipment, so long as such courtesy does not interfere with the police operations, or with general traffic flow. Furthermore, where there is danger of personal injury, access will be restricted until the on-scene supervisor determines the area is safe.
 - 4. When news media representatives arrive on scene of an incident/event, they shall be referred to the on-scene supervisor, or authorized designee.
 - 5. Until the arrival of the Support Services Division Commander, or PIO, the on-scene supervisor may assign an officer to maintain liaison with news media representatives so that those covering the incident or event are updated on any changes.
 - 6. Direct access by news media representatives and photographers will be allowed only after all known evidence has been processed and the on-scene investigation has been completed, in order to preserve and protect the integrity of the scene. **Members of the news media must obtain permission from the owner, or the owner's**

authorized agent, when photographs, films or videotape are to be taken on private property. Employees shall not assist the media in obtaining permission to enter on to private property.

B. News Media Activities that Involve a Serious/Critical Incident, or Crime Scene

1. Although it is desirable to cooperate with the news media, reporters cannot be allowed to interfere with police operations and should be restricted to designated locations and kept out of the Command Post and other areas where police operations are being conducted.
2. Police lines may be established to prevent persons from entering certain areas that are related to a serious/critical incident, or crime scene. Dependent upon the tactical situation and the likelihood of jeopardizing police operations, members of the news media may not be allowed in those areas. Authorization for entry is normally dependent upon judgment of the on-scene supervisor.
3. While members of the news media may be permitted closer access to a crime scene, or an area that involves a serious/critical incident, they do not have the authority to be within an area which has been secured to preserve evidence, or at any location where their presence jeopardizes police operations. Employees shall ensure that the news media respects the established controlled perimeter involving any such incident and/or crime scene.
4. At a serious/critical incident location (e.g., hostage situation, barricaded subject, or other ongoing crises), it shall be the responsibility of the on-scene supervisor, Support Services Division Commander, or PIO, to establish a central media control point as close to the scene as safety and operational requirements allow, for the benefit of media representatives. News media reporters and photographers should be asked to gather at this point to identify themselves.
5. Normally, the Support Services Division Commander, or PIO, will be responsible for news dissemination and keeping the media updated on the progress of the incident and any other pertinent information available for release. Information given to the media may be broadcast over radio and television to which the suspect(s) may have access. Therefore, tactical plans, and contemplated tactical action will not be discussed at all.

C. News Media Not Exempt from Laws

The primary responsibility of the news media is to report the news. Hence, representatives of the news media will respond and remain present at emergency scenes or other locations to obtain information, interview individuals, and record video and/or take photographs for newsworthy incidents or events. However, members of the news media are neither implicitly nor expressly exempt from the requirements of any County ordinance, state, or federal statute.

D. Requesting Withholding of Publication

News professionals may photograph or report anything they observe when legally present at any emergency scene. When publication of this coverage would interfere with an official investigation or place a victim, suspect, or others in jeopardy, the withholding of publication is based on decisions of a cooperative press, not censorship by the

Department. Under these circumstances, the Support Services Division Commander, PIO, or on-scene supervisor, should advise the news media representatives of the possible consequences of publication. However, officers shall not interfere with news media activities as long as the news media representative's actions remain within the confines of the law.

E. Photography

Employees will neither encourage nor discourage the news media from photographing or televising defendants when they are in public places. Employees will not position or pose the accused for the benefit of the news media.

- F. All news media representatives will be granted the same privileges, regardless of their affiliation. No preferential treatment will be accorded any representative of the news media. This statement will neither be construed to prohibit initial reporting, nor will it require notifying all news media prior to the release of information.

V. RELEASE OF INFORMATION TO MEDIA BY DESIGNATED PERSONNEL

The following procedures shall apply to circumstances involving the public release of information through the news media or any other source, and may only be superseded by the discretion, authority and order of the Chief of Police, or authorized designee:

- A. The public release of information shall be dictated by defined priority levels:

LEVEL 1: These shall include, but is not limited to the following: officer-involved deadly and non-deadly force incidents; officer-involved motor vehicle accidents resulting in serious injury or death; employees arrested for criminal offenses while on or off duty; officer deaths in the line of duty; internal investigations; incidents (e.g., natural or man-made disasters that result in multiple deaths, injuries or mass casualties, hazardous materials, etc.) demanding formal press conferences. The public release of information through the news media or any other source for **LEVEL 1** incidents shall be performed by the following designated personnel: Chief of Police, Assistant Chief, Deputy Chief or authorized designee.

LEVEL 2: These shall include, but is not limited to the following: forcible felonies committed against persons; hate crimes; death investigations; officer-involved motor vehicle accidents resulting in minor or no injury; motor vehicle accidents resulting in serious injury or death; juvenile offender(s) who are charged as adults with criminal offenses; mutual-aid incidents; misdemeanor offenses; property crimes; and victimless incidents. The public release of information through the news media or any other source for **LEVEL 2** incidents shall be performed by the following designated personnel: Community Affairs/Public Information personnel, Division Commanders, Sector Captains, Shift/Unit Commanders or the on-scene supervisor (rank of sergeant or higher).

- B. Confirming Incident Types or Making Verbal Statements to the News Media

1. All **LEVEL 2** personnel, i.e., Community Affairs/Public Information Unit personnel, Division Commanders, Sector Captains, Shift/Unit Commanders or the on-scene supervisor (rank of sergeant or higher), are permitted to confirm the incident type (e.g., officer-involved shooting, death investigation, civil disturbance) while on the scene of the initial incident, regardless of the priority level of the incident.

2. All verbal statements beyond confirmations of incident types shall only be made by **LEVEL 2** personnel who possess sufficient knowledge of the incident, either personally, or due to a thorough briefing by other personnel with sufficient knowledge.

In addition to departmental guidelines and applicable laws regarding the public release of information, verbal statements shall adhere to the following guidelines.

- a. The public release of names, addresses, and any other information that may identify victims of a sexual offense, child abuse, or any other crime where the privacy of the victim is protected, is prohibited.
 - b. The public release of identifying information of juveniles involved in any investigation is only permissible with authorization from the Chief of Police, or authorized designee.
 - c. The public release of identifying information of suspects involved in any investigation is only permissible with authorization from the concerned Division Commander, Deputy Chief of Police, Assistant Chief of Police, or the Chief of Police.
 - d. The public release of any information that could compromise or damage the integrity or continuity of an investigation is prohibited.
3. Non-Supervisory Personnel
 - a. Non-supervisory personnel, below the rank of sergeant, are prohibited from making confirmations of incident types to the public or news media, unless authorized or directed to do so by a supervisor (rank of sergeant or higher).
 - b. Non-supervisory personnel, below the rank of sergeant, are prohibited from making any verbal statements beyond confirmations of incident types.
 - c. E911/Communications Center personnel are authorized to confirm the status of current, in-progress motor vehicle accident investigations or other accidents, as they pertain to street hazards and/or closings, during time periods of high traffic volume.
 4. Public Release of Departmental Records
 - a. The Department and its employees will abide by all local, state, and federal laws governing the release of public records.
 - b. The Central Records & Permits Unit Commander is the designated Open Records Manager for the Department; in the absence of the Commander, the next ranking employee from that unit will act as the Open Records Manager for the Department.

See standard operating procedure *E4: Central Records & Permits* regarding the public release of departmental records (e.g., *Incident Reports, Supplemental Reports* and other related documentation).

C. Media Releases During Multi-Agency Investigations

1. When other agencies respond and/or involved in an incident, and this Department is the primary agency responsible for such incident, the Chief of Police, or authorized

designee, shall be responsible for the coordination and release of all news media related information. This decision does not preclude other agencies from participating in news conferences or other media opportunities. PIOs from participating agencies can provide support.

2. The Records Unit will ensure all requested documents, records, *Incident Reports*, *Supplemental Reports*, and other related documentation is provided to the other involved public service agencies in a timely manner and in accordance with departmental policy.
3. If this Department is assisting another agency, the spokesperson for the primary agency should coordinate news media releases. Guidelines should also be created for the lead agency with regards to sharing information with all the involved agencies prior to public dissemination.

VI. REQUIRED PIO NOTIFICATION

- A. Any supervisor (rank of sergeant or higher), who makes verbal statements, beyond confirmations of incident types, to the news media or any other public source is required to immediately notify their chain of command and the on-call PIO.
 1. The supervisor will complete a *Command Notification Incident Detail Sheet*, listing all of the details of the incident and the information released to the news media or other public source.
 2. The supervisor shall utilize the County email system, as soon as practicable, but in any event no later than the end of their shift, to send the *Command Notification Incident Detail Sheet* through their chain of command, the Police Report Notification group, the on-call PIO, and any other concerned and/or affected personnel.
- B. Regardless of the presence of news media, or inquiry by the news media, the following incident types require immediate notification of the on-call PIO, concerned chain of command, the Chief of Police, and any other concerned and/or affected personnel:
 1. Any incident involving the serious injury or death of an officer;
 2. Any major crime of a high and aggravated nature (e.g., homicide, multiple deaths or shootings);
 3. Officer-involved shootings;
 4. Traffic fatalities;
 5. Traffic accidents involving serious or life threatening injuries to an officer, civilian or suspect, resulting from a motor vehicle pursuit;
 6. Any accidents resulting in structural damage to a house, apartment building or business;
 7. Any SWAT Team activation;
 8. Any Bomb Squad activation;
 9. Any major incidents involving mass transportation (e.g., planes, trains, buses);
 10. Any situation where a suspicious device is located;
 11. Arrests of dignitaries or prominent people; and
 12. Hate crimes.

- C. If an on-scene supervisor encounters an incident or situation that is not listed in this chapter, and they feel strongly that the on-call PIO should be notified, they shall notify their chain of command, who shall ultimately determine if the on-call PIO shall be notified.

VII. PIO NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES

PIOs will follow an on-call schedule; however, PIOs are still subject to being called back in at any time. On-call duty begins Monday at 1700 hours, and continues to the following Monday, ending at 0800 hours. After normal business hours, the designated on-call PIO will serve as the Department's spokesperson, unless otherwise directed by the Chief of Police, or authorized designee.

- A. When notification of the PIO is required, supervisors shall contact the PIO using the **Public Information Officer (PIO) Line, 678-610-4781**.

If the concerned supervisor is unable to establish contact with the on-call PIO via cellular phone after 1700 hours, then the on-call PIO shall be called at their alternate phone number.

If the concerned supervisor is still unable to establish contact with the on-call PIO, they shall notify a supervisor assigned to the Support Services Division, Community Affairs/Public Information Unit.

- B. After 1700 hours, if an incident occurs that is not a priority, and the Shift and/or Unit Commander believes that the incident will not attract immediate media attention, then the Shift and/or Unit Commander shall complete a *Command Notification Incident Detail Sheet* and send it via the County email system, as soon as practicable, but in any event no later than the end of their shift, to the Police Report Notification group, the on-call PIO, and any other concerned and/or affected personnel.
- C. If the on-call PIO does not respond to the scene of an incident due to any circumstance, the concerned Shift and/or Unit Commander shall complete a *Command Notification Incident Detail Sheet*, indicating that the on-call PIO was notified, and send it via the County email system, as soon as practicable, but in any event no later than the end of their shift, to the on-call PIO, the Police Report Notification group, and any other concerned and/or affected personnel.

VIII. PIO RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. It shall be the responsibility of the on-call PIO who responds to the scene of an incident type listed in this policy (i.e., subsection VI.B.), to immediately notify the Chief of Police, or authorized designee. Immediate notification is not required if the on-call PIO does not respond to the scene.
- B. Formal departmental press releases, which are completed, will only be presented by the designated PIO, or authorized designee, and shall be approved or authorized by the Chief of Police, or authorized designee, prior to release. Press releases should generally be short in length, one (1) page or less, yet contain sufficient information. When approved and authorized, press releases may be sent to local news media outlets as necessary.

IX. PRESS CONFERENCES

Press conferences may be held in connection with major events of concern to the community. Only the Chief of Police, or authorized designee, may call for a formal press conference. The designated PIO, or authorized designee, will facilitate the coordination and scheduling of a press conference.

X. MEDIA RIDE-A-LONGS

Media ride-a-longs allow members of the news media to accompany law enforcement officers as they perform their duties. All ride-a-longs will abide by the established procedure of this Department. See standard operating procedure *G1: Community Affairs & Crime Prevention* for further information regarding Department ride-a-longs.

XI. TRAINING

The Department is committed to providing proper training for its Public Information Officers (PIOs) and Community Affairs Officers. Personnel authorized to publicly release information or interact with the news media will be provided access to appropriate training.

XII. ETHICS

It is the policy of this Department to treat members of the news media with professionalism and ethical behavior. It is expected that the news media will respond in a like manner and follow ethical guidelines established by their industry.

Personnel who believe they were treated unethically by the news media should contact their immediate supervisor and if necessary, the designated PIO.

XIII. LIVE COVERAGE AGREEMENTS

Live coverage agreements establish voluntary guidelines for the broadcast of the live pictures or information from critical incident scenes (e.g., hostage situations, barricaded subjects). This Department supports the creation, implementation and use of such agreements.

XIV. MEDIA CREDENTIALS

This Department acknowledges representatives from recognized news media organizations who carry and/or display photographic identification issued by their employer. Anyone else is considered a member of the general public.

XV. ALTERNATIVE METHODS TO DISSEMINATE INFORMATION

It is the policy of this Department to pursue alternative methods of disseminating information directly to the public, e.g. community newsletters, government access cable television shows, internet web sites, public appearances by personnel, public area bulletin boards and social media. Any such dissemination will be facilitated through the proper chain of command for approval, and to the Support Services Division Commander, or authorized designee, assigned to the Community Affairs/Public Information Unit.

XVI. CANCELLATION

A. This procedure amends and supersedes the following standard operating procedure: *G2: Public Information & Media Relations*, dated February 8, 2014.