

Police Department Policy and Procedure Manual

Chapter 4 — Operations

Section Number: 4-7-1
Section Title: Media Relations
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I. Policy

- A. It is the policy of this Police Department to cooperate fully and impartially with authorized news media representatives in their efforts to gather factual, public information pertaining to activities of the department, as long as these activities do not unduly interfere with departmental operation, infringe upon individual rights or violate the law. This department will not deny any news media, groups, organizations or individuals any information to which they are legally entitled.

II. Procedures

A. Authority of Departmental Personnel

1. The Chief of Police shall have the responsibility of disseminating all information to the news media.
2. The Chief of Police may delegate his/her authority to disseminate information to other employees within the department as listed within the procedures of this chapter.
3. Even though this authority is delegated, the Chief of Police will be contacted at any time that a major event occurs within this jurisdiction. A major event includes, but is not limited to:
 - a. A homicide
 - b. Officer involved shooting
 - c. Officer seriously injured or killed
 - d. Hostage situation

- e. Police vehicle accidents with serious injuries
- f. The arrest of any department member
- g. Natural disaster such as a tornado, flood, etc.
- h. Terrorist threat or attack
- i. Explosion, bomb threat, fire with fatalities, riot, or any other event or situation which is likely to create significant public interest and will require an extended presence of department personnel to keep the media properly informed.

B. Duties of Department Personnel

1. Assist news personnel in covering routine news stories, and at the scenes of incidents: such as motor vehicle accidents, crime scenes or other major incidents or events.
2. Assist the news media on an on-call basis;
3. Prepare and distribute news releases as authorized;
4. Coordinate and authorize the release of information about victims, witnesses and suspects.

C. Cooperation with the Media

1. Authorized news media representatives shall have reasonable access to the Chief of Police, or his/her designee, and operations of this department as governed by this chapter.
2. Public information shall be released to the media as promptly as circumstances allow, without partiality and in as objective a manner as possible.
3. Public information may be provided to media representatives by telephone if the identity of the representative is known or can be authenticated. Information under these circumstances will be released by the Chief of Police or by the Senior Supervisor on-duty at the time of the request.
4. Ranking officers at crime or incident scenes, may release information of a factual nature to the media as governed by this policy or refer the inquiry to the Chief of Police. Where the officer is unsure of the facts or the propriety of releasing information, he/she shall refer the inquiry to the Chief of Police.
5. Written press statements shall be released only following approval of the Chief of Police or his/her designee.

D. Investigative Information

1. From the initial stage of a criminal investigation until the completion of trial, department personnel shall refer all requests for information to the Chief of Police or his/her designee.
 - a. Information that may be released in connection with an investigation of an event or crime includes
 - (a) The type or nature of an event or crime;
 - (b) The location, date and time, injuries sustained, damages and a general description of how the incident occurred;
 - (c) Type and quantity of property taken;
 - (d) The identity and approximate address of a victim with the exception of sex crime victims, and in other cases where reprisals or intimidation may be employed;
 - (e) Requests for aid in locating evidence, a complainant or a suspect;
 - (f) Numbers of officers or people involved in an event or investigation, the length of the investigation, and the different departments involved; and
 - (g) The name of the officer in charge of a case (exception: the name of any undercover officer will not be released).
 - (h) The name, address, and age of any adult individual(s) arrested for the crime or event. NOTE: names of juveniles can only be released pursuant to State Code.
 - b. Information that may not be released in connection with an investigation of a crime, unless authorized by the Chief of Police, include:
 - (a) The identity of a suspect prior to arrest unless such information would aid in apprehending the suspect or serve to warn the public of potential danger. In any event, this information should not be released unless probable cause has been established and a warrant of arrest has been obtained for the suspect;
 - (b) The identity of any victim of a sex crime or any related information which, if divulged, could lead to the victim's identity;
 - (c) The identity of victims or witnesses if such disclosure would prejudice an investigation to any significant degree, or if it would place the victim or witnesses in personal danger;

- (d) The identity of any juvenile who is a suspect or defendant in a case subject to the jurisdiction of the juvenile court;
- (e) The identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to notification of next of kin;
- (f) The results of any investigative procedure such as lineups, polygraph tests, fingerprint comparison, ballistics tests or other procedures;
- (g) Information, which, if prematurely released, may interfere with the investigation or apprehension of a suspect, such as the nature of leads, specifics of an "MO", details of the crime known only to the perpetrator and law enforcement personnel, or information that may cause the suspect to flee or more effectively avoid apprehension;
- (h) Information that may be of evidentiary value in criminal proceedings;
- (i) Specific cause of death unless officially determined by the medical examiner;
- (j) The home address or telephone number of any department member.
- (k) In the event a GAG ORDER is issued by any court of law, information concerning the crime or event in question will not be released until that order has been rescinded.

E. Arrest Information:

1. Following arrest, issuance of an arrest warrant or filing of an information or indictment, it is permissible to release:
 - a. The accused's name, age, residence, occupation and family status;
 - b. The time and place of arrest, whether pursuit or resistance was encountered, whether weapons were used, charges placed against the suspect and description of contraband seized;
 - c. The identity of the arresting officers and the duration of the investigation unless the officers are engaged in undercover operations, and
 - d. The amount of bond, scheduled court dates and place of the suspect's detention.
2. Following arrest and formal charging of a suspect, but prior to adjudication, the following types of information should not be released without the express permission of the Chief of Police:
 - a. Prior criminal conviction record, character or reputation of a defendant;

- b. Existence or contents of any confession, admission or statement of a defendant, or his/her failure or unwillingness to make a statement;
- c. Performance or results of any tests, or a defendant's refusal or failure to submit to tests such as a polygraph;
- d. Identity, statement or expected testimony of any witness or victim;
- e. Any opinion about the guilt or innocence of a defendant or the merits of the case; or
- f. Any opinion or knowledge of the potential for a plea bargain or other pretrial action.

III. Special Considerations - Criminal Matters:

- A. Personnel of this department shall extend every reasonable courtesy to news media representatives at crime scenes. This may include closer access of media personnel and equipment than available to the general public to the degree that it does not interfere with the law enforcement mission or movement of traffic.
- B. The news media shall not be allowed access to any area or scene of an incident or crime where there is a possibility that evidence may be damaged, altered, destroyed or otherwise prejudiced by its existence being published or portrayed. Once evidence has been processed, removed and secured by the department, the media may be allowed to enter by permission of the ranking Supervisor at the scene.
 - 1. On private property, photography, film or videotaping by the media requires the permission of the owner or the owner's representative.
 - 2. Suspects or accused persons in custody shall not be posed or arrangements made for photographs, telecasts or interviews, nor shall department personnel pose with suspects or accused persons in custody. This does not prohibit, however, media representatives from taking photographs or videotape of suspects or departmental employees at a crime or incident scene.
 - 3. When an individual is charged with a criminal offense photographs or mug shots may be released to the media upon request and with the approval of the Chief of Police or his/her designee.

IV. Special Considerations

- A. The officer in charge of a crime or incident scene should consider allowing access to the news media by means of an officer escorting the media personnel through the area. This will allow for media coverage without disturbing any of the physical evidence present.

Exercising this procedure will depend on circumstances which exist at each scene and the use of discretion by the officer in charge.

- B. Daily police activity logs and reports of criminal activity will be made available on a routine basis to media representatives within this jurisdiction, or to representatives outside the jurisdiction which request the information.
- C. All employees of this department will be courteous and cooperative when dealing with members of the news media as well as with all other individuals or groups requesting information.
- D. Any disagreement or misunderstanding between police department personnel and the news media concerning the release of information shall be referred to the Chief of Police, or in his/her absence, the ranking on-duty Supervisor.



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