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## **POLICY**

It is the policy of the Douglas County Sheriff's Office (DCSO) to inform the public and the news media of events that involve the DCSO and its members in a timely manner while respecting victims, protecting the rights of individuals in police custody, and preventing the disclosure of confidential police information. DCSO members will refer to the DCSO "Records" policy for procedures on the release of records and the information therein.

## **PROCEDURE**

### **I. Public Information Function**

- A. The Chief Deputies are assigned to manage the Public Information function for the Operations and Administration Function but may designate the function to Bureau Captains as appropriate.
  - 1. The Chief Deputies and Bureau Captains will receive training related to the function. (54.1.4)
- B. The DCSO is committed to a cooperative public information relationship with the media that includes:
  - 1. Assisting media personnel in covering news stories at the scenes of incidents. (54.1.1a)
  - 2. Being available for on-call responses to the news media. (54.1.1a)
  - 3. Preparing and distributing agency news releases. (54.1.1b)
  - 4. Arranging for and assisting at news conferences. (54.1.1c)
  - 5. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects. (54.1.1d)
  - 6. Assisting in crisis situations within the agency.
  - 7. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential agency investigations and operations. (54.1.1e)
  - 8. Developing procedures for releasing information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort. (54.1.1f)

### **II. Procedures for General Release of Information (54.1.1f)**

- A. Information will be released in accordance with all applicable federal and state statutes. DCSO members will adhere to the procedures in the DCSO "Records" policy when releasing records or information therein.

- B. Only the Sheriff or Chief Deputies will approve the release of information regarding:
  - 1. Agency policy, procedure, rules, and regulations.
  - 2. Internal investigations.
  - 3. Crime/clearance rates.
- C. Bureau Captains may release information pertaining to their bureaus.
- D. Information released via social media will be released in accordance with the DCSO "Social Media" policy. (54.1.1g)

### **III. Guidelines for the Release of Information to the Media by On-Scene Deputies**

- A. Deputies' primary responsibility when responding to the scene of a crime is to preserve the integrity of the scene, to gather evidence, and to complete other needed investigative activities.
- B. In order to ensure that information released to the news media is accurate, and the Deputies are able to fulfill their responsibilities at the scene, the command officer of the incident, or designee, will be responsible for releasing general information regarding the incident, including, but not limited to:
  - 1. Offense committed or nature of incident.
  - 2. Time of the incident.
  - 3. Location of the incident.
- C. Deputies will not release suspect or victim information on-scene to the media unless directed to do so by DCSO command or the appropriate investigative unit.
- D. Media representatives who have follow-up questions that cannot be answered on-scene may be directed to obtain more detailed information regarding the incident by contacting the appropriate Bureau Captain or Chief Deputy as appropriate.

### **IV. Special Circumstances**

- A. Incidents Involving Child Victims, Sexual Assault Victims, Homicides, or ERU Call-Outs
  - 1. The on-scene command officer will coordinate the release of information to the media with the commander of the appropriate investigative unit, the respective Bureau Captain, and/or Chief Deputy.
- B. Deputy-Involved Incidents
  - 1. Only the Sheriff or designee will authorize information to be released to the media in these incidents.
  - 2. DCSO members will adhere to the procedures in the DCSO "Use of Force – Deputy-Involved Investigations" policy.
- C. Multi Law-Enforcement Agency Response (54.1.1f)

1. When the DCSO is working in a mutual effort with other law enforcement agencies, a consensus among the participating agencies will determine the content and method of releasing information by the most appropriate agency. The respective Chief Deputy or designee will coordinate this effort.

**D. Fire Scenes**

1. All news releases regarding multiple alarm fires, deaths due to fire, arson, investigations, or hazardous material incidents will be handled by the chief of the respective fire department or designee.
2. The DCSO will be responsible for releasing information on deaths due to arson.

**V. Media Interviews**

- A. Except in the case of on-scene interviews conducted by the on-scene command officer or designee (see Section III above), any member of the DCSO who is contacted by the media for interviews or information will submit the request to the respective Chief Deputy via their chain of command.
1. There will be no interviews given to the media regarding policies, procedures, or events involving the agency by a member of the DCSO without prior approval from the Sheriff or respective Chief Deputy.
- B. On-Scene Interviews
1. Prior to conducting an on-camera interview, Deputies will prepare the media off-camera to make certain that the media clearly understands the incident.  
  
**NOTE:** Preparing the media off-camera will allow the media to ask questions prior to the interview and allow the Deputy to better formulate an appropriate response.
  2. Deputies will be aware that some reporters may be carrying the interview live via their cellular phone or other device. Deputies will ask reporters if anyone will be carrying the interview live so that the Deputy may prepare accordingly.

**VI. Media Access to Scenes (54.1.3)**

- A. Media representatives will be allowed anywhere the general public is allowed.
1. Any citizen or news media representative has the right to photograph or videotape Deputies performing their official duties.
  2. Deputies are not responsible for censoring the media or ensuring responsible reporting practices. However, Deputies are responsible for scene security and may shield a scene or evidence from the view of the public or media when appropriate.
- B. The on-scene command officer will be responsible for designating a media staging location on-scene that provides the media with a safe location to film and report on the incident as appropriate.

1. The line over which the media may not cross will be a reasonable distance away from the scene in order to ensure its protection, yet provide the media an opportunity to adequately report and photograph the incident.
  2. At the discretion of the ranking Deputy, a perimeter, closer to the scene than the perimeter for the general public, may be established for the media. Security of the scene and preservation of evidence will be the determining factors.
- C. The following restrictions to media access may be applied when necessary:
1. Media representatives will not be allowed access to any area that would obviously disrupt DCSO operations or deployment.
  2. Media representatives will not be allowed access to an area where their presence would jeopardize the life of, or present substantial risk of injury to any citizen or DCSO member.
  3. Media representatives will 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.
    - a. Once evidence has been processed, removed, or secured by DCSO members, the media may be allowed to enter by the ranking member on the scene.
  4. If the crime scene is on private property, the owner/agent or person in control of the property denies members of the media permission to enter onto the property in the presence of a Deputy, Deputies will ensure that the media does not enter onto the property.
  5. Media will be expected to adhere to all traffic/parking laws around the scene and will not block emergency vehicles from accessing the scene.
    - a. In accordance with NSS §60-6,144, the media will not stop on the interstate to gain access to an accident/scene.
- D. Special Circumstances
1. Natural Disaster Catastrophic Events Access
    - a. Although the scene of a natural disaster or other catastrophic event may be closed to the general public, authorized media representatives are exempt from restriction, and will not be denied access solely because of the danger.
    - b. When danger is the only consideration, media personnel will be advised of the dangerous conditions and will be responsible for their own decisions to enter the scene.
  2. Fire Scene Access
    - a. The fire commander will control media access to and movement within fire lanes at commercial and residential fire scenes.

- b. When news media arrive at a fire scene, the ranking Deputy on scene will confer with the fire commander and assist in establishing an observation point from which media may observe and photograph.

## **VII. Media Access to Persons in Police Custody**

- A. Persons involved in incidents who are in police custody will not be allowed to discuss the incident with news media representatives.
- B. Individuals in custody will not be posted for the news media to photograph.
  - 1. Agency photographs of an arrested person, when taken according to DCSO procedures, may be released provided it will not jeopardize an investigation.
  - 2. The media may take photographs of the suspect at the scene if the suspect is in plain view of the media provided it will not jeopardize the investigation.
    - a. Deputies do not need to take extraordinary measure to shield the suspect at the scene, unless photographing the suspect will jeopardize the investigation.
    - b. If the media is photographing the suspect at the scene in plain view, and the suspect is a juvenile, Deputies will notify the photographer that the suspect is a juvenile as a courtesy.

## **VIII. Media Relations**

- A. On-scene media may be a good source of investigative information. Investigative Deputies who arrive on-scene are encouraged to greet the media and build rapport as they may have information useful to the investigation.
- B. Deputies will inform their chain of command if they have had any conflict and/or confrontation with media representatives in the course of their duty.
- C. Deputies will notify the Sheriff as soon as possible via chain of command when a media representative has been arrested.
- D. The DCSO will involve local media in the development of or changes in policies and procedures relating to the public information function. (54.1.2)

## **REFERENCES**

### **I. DCSO Orders**

- A. Previous DCSO General Orders include: #73-2023, #19-2019, #20-2018, #30-2015, and #29-2007.

### **II. Accreditation Standards**

- A. Applicable CALEA Accreditation standards include: Chapter 54.

### **III. Review Schedule**

- A. Quadrennial.