



Graham Police Department

Standard Operating Policies and Procedures

Policy: 42

Subject: Public Information\News Media

DEPARTMENT POLICY

It is the policy of the Graham Police Department to cooperate fully and impartially with accredited representatives of the news media in their efforts to gather and disseminate factual information, where consistent with established procedures, and where such activities do not subvert the ends of justice or infringe upon individual rights of privacy or upon individual rights to a fair and impartial trial.

PURPOSE:

To establish guidelines for media relations. This policy should not be construed as a denial to the news media of their right to accomplish their assignment nor restrict the rights granted to them by the Constitution of the United States or laws of the State of North Carolina.

I. Legal Authority

A. Assisting the Media

The Graham Police Department will make information available to the media in a timely manner, North Carolina General Statute [132-1.4 \(c\)](#) provides that the following information shall be public record:

1. The time, date, location and nature of a violation or apparent violation of the law reported to a public law enforcement agency.
2. The name, sex, age, address, employment and alleged violation of the law of a person arrested, charged or indicted.
3. The circumstances surrounding an arrest, including the time and place of the arrest, whether the arrest involved resistance, possession or use of weapons or pursuit and a description of any items seized in connection with the arrest.
4. The name, sex, age, address of the complaining witness.

The above information is included in the Crime/Incident Summary report.

- B. It is the responsibility of the Public Information Officer or his designee to assist the media in obtaining the information that they are entitled to have.
- C. Police traffic crash reports, which excludes other reports, are available at the following website for view by the media or the general public. The web address is graham.ecrash.interplat.com.

II. Media Interaction

The goal of this department is to encourage fair media coverage. To do this we must provide appropriate information to the media during and after normal business hours. This requires all personnel responsible for public information to respond in a manner of mutual cooperation and assist the media in obtaining the information they need, in accordance with the law and in a timely manner. Members of the department will not favor a specific reporter or news agency over another.

III. Public Information Officer

- A. The Support Services Division Commander is the Public Information Officer (PIO), as assigned by the Chief of Police, and is responsible for coordinating the release of information to the media. Upon request and as information becomes available regarding previous or ongoing incidents/investigations, the PIO will pass along information to the media.
- B. The PIO will conduct or coordinate feature story interviews requested by the media representatives. Supervisors will contact the PIO when the media makes request of this nature.
- C. The Chief of Police will contact the PIO when a press conference needs to be scheduled. A press conference can be held at the scene or at any location that the PIO deems necessary.
- D. The PIO is responsible for identifying newsworthy information within the department. This information will be used to develop public relations material and press releases which will be disseminated to the media via departmental approved News release forms. Matters of public interest, city events and breaking news shall also be disseminated via the Police Department moderated social media sites to include, but not limited to, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. These documents may include the use of crime trends, crime prevention and safety measures. This information can be obtained through daily contacts with the different divisions in the department.

E. After business hours and on weekends and holidays, the PIO should be contacted and respond to the following situations:

1. Hostage Situations
2. Police Related Shootings
3. Other events generating a significant level of media attention.

F. The PIO will receive training on law enforcement public information functions.

G. The PIO will supervise the agency's social media function

IV. Supervisory Responsibilities

Supervisors are required to ensure that the media is provided with appropriate information regarding current events and details of serious incidents. It is the responsibility of each supervisor to assist in the coordination of accurate information. In the absence of the PIO or his designee, a Sergeant or above will coordinate the efforts to ensure compliance.

In accordance with [NCGS 132-1.4](#), Supervisors may be required to give additional information to the media regarding reports maintained in the Records Management System of the police department. It may also require obtaining a photo of an arrested subject. It is crucial that Supervisors recognize their responsibility to assist the media within the policy guidelines.

All Supervisors are authorized to draft press releases at night and on weekends and holidays when a particular incident does not require the PIO to respond but the information is of interest and needs to be disseminated to the media. All news media releases shall be in typed form and submitted to the PIO no later than 8:00 AM the next business day after the event has occurred. When additional information is requested by the media, they will be directed to the Patrol Supervisor if after hours or on weekends and holidays.

In the event the news media arrives at the scene of a crime occurring after the business day, the on-duty supervisor, investigator or highest ranking officer may release information in compliance with this policy and North Carolina General Statutes, as in respect to departmental employee and complaining witness information.

V. Confidential Information

In the event of crisis situations within the agency such as mass layoffs, criminal charges against employees, etc., the PIO shall assist in designing a news release or news conference as described above. The Chief of Police or his/her designate shall be responsible for coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential agency investigations and operations in accordance with this policy and state law.

VI. Other Public Service Agencies

When more than one agency is involved in an activity, the agency having primary jurisdiction will be responsible for releasing or coordinating the release of information to the media. If necessary, the department will attempt to coordinate a joint release of information. Basic information can be given out.

VII. Release of Information

A. Information which may be released

1. The name, age, place of residence, employment, marital status or similar background information of a person charged with a crime, the offense charged, the time and place of arrest.
2. Whether weapons were found or used, and description of evidence or contraband seized if not prejudicial to the outcome of the case.
3. The name of the victim, residence, place offense occurred, type of offense, items stolen, damaged, etc., and value, and any other general information that would not be prejudicial to the outcome of the case.
4. The identity of investigators and arresting officers.

B. Information not to be released

1. Specific information in which public disclosure could jeopardize the apprehension of a suspect, an investigation or the prosecution of an offender.
2. Name, address and photograph of a suspect(s) or person(s) suspected of a crime or wanted for questioning when that information could jeopardize the investigation process. Oftentimes, the news media will assist us with the investigation when we are trying to locate a subject.
3. The identity, testimony or credibility of any prospective witness.
4. Opinions concerning guilt or innocence, the merits of the case or the strength of the evidence.
5. Arrest records or statements regarding the character or reputation of the accused.
6. Information regarding the existence or contents of any incriminating statement or confession. The refusal or failure of an accused to make any statement or the possibility of a guilty plea to the offense or of a lesser offense.
7. Information concerning the performance of any examination or tests: such as, a Computer Voice Stress Analysis (CVSA) or polygraph or the refusal to submit to such tests.
8. Information that would only be known by the suspect. For example, how the crime was committed, caliber of weapon used, etc.
9. Any information identifying juvenile offenders, to include name, address or telephone

- numbers of suspect(s).
10. Information concerning the construction, content or mechanism of any explosive or incendiary device to include false bombs.
 11. Official photographs that form part of an investigation.
 12. Information received from other law enforcement agencies unless authorized by the Chief of police or his designee.
 13. Names of victims of sexual assaults.
 14. The names of deceased persons shall not be released prior to notification of the person's next of kin.

C. Arrest Records

1. Information on arrest of persons and dispositions of these arrests should be obtained from the Clerk of Courts Office. No information in the DCI computer system can be released to the public or the person requesting information about his own record.
2. Arrest records in our Records Management System shall be made available to the news media. They will show all arrests in their jurisdiction but may not indicate the final disposition.

VIII. Photography

- A. Photographs of defendants shall not be presented in public places except in courtrooms and adjacent corridors as directed by a trial judge.
- B. An arrested person shall not be deliberately posed for a news media photograph or filming.
- C. The media can photograph crime/incident scenes at their discretion and will assume full responsibility for the use of such photographs or films. Department members will not prohibit media photographers from fulfilling their tasks, provided the photographers are situated outside the secured crime scene area as designated by the detective or supervisor until processing of the scene is complete.

IX. Crime\Incident Scenes

- A. Crime/incident scenes will be secured in a manner that is obvious to the public and the media. Crime scene tape will be used to establish the perimeter of the secured crime scene area. Media personnel will not be allowed access into the area as long as the investigation is ongoing.
- B. Media representatives with appropriate identification will be admitted on foot, past police or fire barricades and roadblocks, but will not be allowed into the secured crime scene area. Media representatives will be permitted free access on any street, sidewalk or public area but subject to the restrictions noted above.

- C. Reasonable effort will be made by the ranking supervisor at the scene to inform the media of the basic facts regarding a crime/incident. Detailed information will be furnished by a representative from the PIO if they respond or by the supervisor as soon as practical.
- D. The PIO or supervisor in charge of the incident will designate a location where information will be disseminated to the media during an unusual occurrence, natural disaster or other event generating significant media attention.
- E. At the completion of the crime/incident scene investigation, media representatives will not be denied access onto privately owned grounds. It is the responsibility of the controller of private properties to deny or permit entry. Officers do not have authority to invite representatives of the news media onto the private property.
- F. If an officer observes a media representative interfere or commit a criminal violation, that person will be treated the same as any other citizen. The officer will immediately report any media interference or criminal violation to his supervisor or the PIO. If a media representative is being unreasonable in his request for access to a scene or information about an incident or is obstructing you from performing your legal duties, you shall not be expected to cooperate with that representative. Protection of life and the crime scene are of utmost importance. Officers should arrest as a last resort. An investigation into the matter will be conducted and the representative's supervisor will be notified.
- G. The Fire department is responsible for releasing information to the media at fire scenes except when the fire is determined to be intentionally set. The Police Department responds to the media in reference to arson investigations. It is the Police Department's responsibility to provide traffic and crowd control at the direction of the Fire Department Commander. Blockades established for traffic control purposes are not meant to disallow media access to the scene. Media access to the scene is allowed at the discretion of the Fire Department scene commander. Media personnel will not enter the secured incident/crime scene area.

X. Personnel Information

- A. In accordance with NCGS 160A-168, the following is a matter of public record with respect to city employees:
 - 1. Name
 - 2. Age
 - 3. Date of original employment or appointment to service
 - 4. Current position title
 - 5. Current salary
 - 6. Date and amount of the most recent increase or decrease in salary.
 - 7. Date of the most recent promotion, demotion, transfer, suspension, separation or other change in position classification.

8. The office to which the employee is currently assigned
- B. All inquiries regarding the above information will be referred to the City Personnel Department for verification and release. Information regarding internal investigations other than what is cited above is not public information.

XI. Media Input

Selected media representatives shall be permitted to participate in the development of changes in policy and procedure relating to news media. The chief administrator in conjunction with the PIO shall select at a minimum, one representative from each of the various media (television, radio, newspaper) to assist in this capacity. They shall also be provided with a copy of any changes after such are approved and completed.

XII. Social Media

- A. The social media coordinator(s), appointed by the Chief of Police, will maintain and monitor the Office's social networking accounts.
- B. No social media application will be initiated or run in the name of the agency without the expressed permission of the Chief of Police. No employee will post material on behalf of the agency without approval by the Chief of Police.
- C. Requests by divisions/employees to utilize social media as a formal communications tool must be submitted to a social media coordinator.
- D. Request to develop projects or program-specific uses for any social media tools should be directed to a social media coordinator for consultation and development.
- E. Social Media Posting, Commenting and Comment Monitoring
 1. Where possible, each departmental social media page will include an introductory statement that clearly specifies the purpose and scope of the agency's presence on the website.
 2. Where possible, social media pages should state that the opinions expressed by visitors do not reflect the opinions of the department or the Chief of Police.
 3. The agency's social networking pages are available for any comment on topics relevant to the business of the agency or in response to a posting. The comments may be positive or negative, praise or criticism. There are several advantages to social media networking to include community outreach and communication and establishing a forum for interested people to share comments and criticisms with the agency so that personnel may learn about real or perceived shortcomings and respond

- appropriately either by disseminating correct information, offering an explanation or changing its actions and reporting the change.
4. Where possible, pages will clearly indicate that posted comments will be monitored and the department reserves the right to remove obscenities, off-topic comments, and personal attacks. Such comments include but are not limited to, name-calling, profanity, obscenity, defamation or remarks disparaging people on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability or national origin. The social media coordinator may remove inappropriate comments from the webpage as soon as they are discovered. No comments will be deleted from the agency's social media where there is the ability to hide comments. If the ability to hide comments does not exist and the social media coordinator determines the comment is so extreme that it would be detrimental to leave the comment as is, the comment should be captured via screen shot if the account is not archived and saved for future reference.
 5. Site Shut-Down and Archive. The social media coordinator will have the username and passwords to all of the department's official accounts with the ability to shut down the sites if needed. Where possible, social media sites will be archived through Archive Social and employees with official departmental social media sites will connect them to Archive Social for that purpose with the assistance of the City of Graham IT personnel.
 6. Adherence to Applicable Law, Regulations and Policies. Social media content will adhere to all applicable laws, regulations and policies including all information technology and records management policies. Social media content is subject to public records laws. Relevant records retention schedules apply to social media. Content must be managed, stored and retrieved to comply with open records laws and discovery laws and policies.
 7. Personnel representing the department via social media outlets will identify themselves as a member of the department and will adhere to all agency policies. No employee shall individually represent themselves as speaking for the Chief of Police except for the Public Information Officer.
 8. Employees will use the department's profile to make posts regarding department information and will not use their personal accounts to convey information on behalf of the department. Social media posts should not include statements regarding the guilt or innocence of any arrestee and will not include any confidential information without the express written permission of the Chief of Police or the Chief's designee.

F. Significant Events

1. During a significant event, the incident commander or assigned supervisor shall promptly undertake the following actions:
 - a. Promptly evaluate the situation to comprehensively grasp the nature, extent, and ramifications of the event.
 - b. Ascertain whether external communication is necessary for the incident and

identify pertinent information for immediate dissemination via social media.

2. Instances mandating immediate communication include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Incidents involving firearm discharge
 - b. Major road closures with community travel implications
 - c. Urgent Missing Person cases necessitating community aid
 - d. Any noteworthy occurrence that has the potential to cause apprehension, distress, or endangerment to community members.
3. The incident commander/supervisor will formulate essential and accurate key messages that effectively communicate information about the event. These messages should prioritize public safety, offer reassurance to the community, and provide informative details.
4. The incident commander/supervisor will ensure that all messaging undergoes a comprehensive review and attains approval from the appropriate personnel.
5. Following approval, the incident commander/supervisor will expedite the communication of the messages through the police department's official social media platforms.

*Note: Local Radio and Newspaper Media were contacted in assisting with the formulating of this policy