

- A. **PURPOSE:** To establish guidelines for transparency of police operations and crime incidents in our jurisdiction with and through the news media.
- B. **GOAL:** To work with our media partners to provide factual, timely, and relevant information to our community, if the information does not interfere with departmental operations, endanger departmental members, infringe upon individual rights, or violate the law.
- C. **RESPONSIBILITIES IN RELEASING INFORMATION:** It is ultimately the responsibility of the Chief of Police to release information to the public. That responsibility may be delegated to the following personnel:
 - 1. Public Information Officer (PIO) or PIO designee. The PIO is the primary contact for the news media.
 - 2. Watch commanders, especially those on duty nights/weekends/holidays.
 - 3. Deputy Chiefs of Police.
 - 4. Other command staff members.
 - 5. Other employees, as directed by the Chief of Police, Deputy Chiefs of Police, PIO, or command staff.
- D. **SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES**
 - 1. The PIO shall support the agency and its personnel in matters involving the news media. To accomplish this, the PIO shall:
 - a. Be the primary contact for the news media during normal business hours and be on call for emergencies and/or critical incidents at all other times.
 - b. Assist media personnel with inquiries in a timely and professional manner.
 - c. Assist news media by conducting interviews or coordinating interviews with departmental subject matter experts.
 - d. Prepare and distribute public information releases to be disseminated to the media and to agency employees on major incidents and events of community interest or concern.
 - e. Coordinate media briefings.

- f. In addition to media releases, use appropriate departmental and/or City information channels to share information with the public.

2. The Watch Commander shall:

- a. Assist media personnel by providing basic incident information as soon as practical nights/weekends/holidays.
- b. Notify the PIO about incidents, as specified in the departmental notification matrix, in a timely manner.

E. PROCEDURE

1. Cooperation with the Media

- a. Media representatives shall have reasonable access to the PIO, the Chief of Police, and the operations of the Department as governed by this policy.
 - b. Public information shall be released to the media as promptly as circumstances allow without partiality and in as objective a manner as possible.
 - c. Ranking officers at crime or incident scenes may release information to the media as governed by this policy. Where the officer is unsure of the facts or the propriety of releasing information, the officer shall refer the inquiry to the PIO.
 - d. When the full-time PIO is unavailable, a back-up will be designated to assume all PIO responsibilities. This will be communicated internally to command staff and key specialty units and externally to local media contacts as appropriate.
2. Investigative Information. The person releasing information shall ensure that the information being released does not compromise an investigation.
- a. Information that may be released in connection with an investigation of an event or crime includes:
 - (1) The type and nature of an event or crime.

- (2) The location, date and time, injuries sustained, damages, and a general description of how the incident occurred.
 - (3) Description of suspect(s) if there is an immediate threat to public safety or if investigators are requesting the community's help in identification. Releasing an image is preferable to a written description, if available.
 - (4) Basic description of associated weapons and vehicles if there is an immediate threat to public safety and/or if investigators are requesting the community's help in identification. Releasing an image is preferable to a written description, if available.
 - (5) A general description of property taken, excluding monetary amounts in the case of bank robberies or armed robberies.
 - (6) A general description of the victim (e.g. adult female, juvenile male). The victim's age may be provided if it is deemed relevant.
 - (7) Basic description of injuries and the initial condition of victim(s). In the interest of victim privacy, ongoing updates about a victim's condition are not usually provided, unless the change in condition has implications for potential charges.
- b. Information that shall **not** be released in connection with an investigation of an event or crime, unless authorized by the Chief of Police or designee includes:
- (1) The identity of a suspect prior to arrest unless such information would aid in apprehension or serve to warn the public of potential danger.
 - (2) The identity of any victim of a sex crime, child abuse, or any other crime where the privacy of the victim is protected by law.
 - (3) The identity of witnesses would interfere with an investigation or place the person in danger.
 - (4) The identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to notification of next of kin.
 - (5) The results of any investigative procedure such as lineups, polygraph tests, fingerprint comparison, ballistics test, or other

procedures (the fact that such tests were performed may be revealed without further comment).

- (6) Information that may interfere with the investigation such as specific case facts known only to the suspect(s) and police.
- (7) Specific cause of death until confirmed by the medical examiner.
- (8) The home address or phone number of any member of the Department
- (9) Misleading or false information

3. Arrest information

- a. Following an arrest or issuance of an arrest warrant, it is permissible to release:
 - (1) For adult offenders: name, age, and the charges against them. Juvenile offenders' names or other identifying information should not be released unless they are being charged as an adult.
 - (2) The date, time, and place of arrest, whether resistance was encountered, whether weapons were used.
 - (3) The amount of bond and pending court dates (if known).
- b. Following arrest and formal charging of a suspect, but prior to adjudication, the following types of information should not be released without the permission of the Chief of Police:
 - (1) Character or reputation of a defendant.
 - (2) Existence of or contents of any confession or admission, the contents of a defendant's statement, or his failure or unwillingness to make a statement.
 - (3) Performance or results of any test or a defendant's refusal to submit to such tests.
 - (4) Statement or expected testimony of any witness or victim.
 - (5) Any opinion about the guilt or innocence of a defendant or the merits of the case.

- (6) Any opinion or knowledge of the potential for a plea bargain or other pretrial action.

4. Special Considerations – Criminal Matters

- a. Departmental personnel shall extend reasonable courtesy to members of the media at incident scenes.
- b. The media shall not be allowed access to any area or scene where there is a possibility that evidence may be damaged, altered, or destroyed.
 - (1) Media representatives must have permission from the property owner to enter private property.
 - (2) Suspects in custody shall not be posed for filming or photographing.
- c. The fact that a suicide or suspected suicide has occurred may be reported to the media, along with information describing how it happened. The name and age of the victim may be released after notification of the next of kin has been confirmed. The presence of a suicide note may be confirmed; however, the content of the note is **not** to be released.
- d. No member of this agency shall prohibit the media from news-gathering practices including photography and interviews, outside the established perimeter.
- e. At critical incident scenes, the PIO and members of the agency shall work in close cooperation with the media to ensure that live broadcasts do not disclose any information that could endanger law enforcement personnel or the public or interfere with the apprehension of suspect(s).
- f. In incidents where GRPD is supporting or assisting other law enforcement agencies or City public safety departments, reporters should be referred to the lead agency/department. Grand Rapids police personnel may speak specifically to our department's involvement as appropriate.

- g. Prior to the names of Department employees being released to the media, the employees involved will be made aware of the impending release.

5. Special Considerations —General

- a. Sensitive information relating to Internal Affairs investigations or civil litigation shall not be released without the permission of the Chief of Police.
- b. Unless the department has determined that a proactive release of records, usually video, is warranted, media representatives requesting any departmental records shall be referred to the Records Unit to submit a Freedom of Information Act request through the established procedures.
- c. Information that could result in one or more of the following outcomes should not be released:
 - (1) Endanger the life or physical safety of any person.
 - (2) Deprive a person of the right to a fair trial.
 - (3) Constitute an unwarranted invasion of the personal privacy rights of another person.
 - (4) Interfere with pending criminal investigations.
 - (5) Reveal the identity of a confidential source.
 - (6) Disclose law enforcement techniques that would impair the future effectiveness of the department.

F. Media Requests

- 1. Requests for assistance with television or radio programs or preparations of articles for publication will be considered individually and will be coordinated by the PIO in consultation with the Chief's Office and/or departmental subject matter experts.
- 2. Employees assisting in this manner should supply the requested information consistent with this procedure.

3. Employees should be cautious to avoid representing as fact that which is opinion.