

- A. **PURPOSE.** To establish guidelines to share accurate, timely, and relevant information with the news media and the public regarding serious incidents or departmental activities.

- B. **GOAL.** To cooperate fully with members of the media in their efforts to gain factual public information insomuch as these activities do 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. Supervisors. Supervisors with responsibility for a specific case or incident may be the secondary contact for the news media in the absence of the PIO.

 - 3. Deputy Chiefs of Police.

 - 4. Command Staff.

 - 5. Other Employees, as directed by the Chief of Police, Deputy Chiefs of Police, PIO, or Command Staff.

D. SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES

- 1. The Public Information Officer (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 in covering routine news stories.

 - c. Assist news media by conducting interviews or coordinating interviews with other qualified agency personnel.

- 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. Arrange and facilitate news conferences.
 - f. Coordinate the release of information to social media
2. The Watch Commander shall:
- a. Assist media personnel in covering routine, Grand Rapids Police Department-related news stories outside normal business hours and in the absence of the PIO.
 - b. Contact the PIO utilizing the departmental notification matrix according to its listed incident types in a timely manner.
 - c. Release information connected to an incident as soon as practical in compliance with this procedure.
 - d. Coordinate the release of information with on-scene personnel in the absence of the PIO.

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 manner as possible.
 - c. Ranking officers at crime or incident scenes may release factual 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. In the absence of the PIO, public information releases shall be prepared and distributed by the PIO's designee. If the PIO and or designee is unavailable, public information releases shall be prepared by the ranking officers involved in than incident with significant media interest.
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 suspects
 - (4) Basic description of weapons and vehicles used
 - (5) Type and quantity of property taken, excluding monetary amounts, i.e. bank robberies or armed robberies
 - (6) The identity of a victim with the exception of sex crime victims or in cases where retaliation or intimidation may be expected
 - (7) Basic description of injuries and condition of victims
 - (8) Requests for assistance in locating a suspect
 - (9) Suspect booking photograph
 - (10) Name of officer in charge of a case, an officer's supervisor and unit assignment (exception: undercover officers)
 - 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 if such disclosure 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) The name, age, and other basic information about arrestees and the charges against them
 - (2) The date, time and place of arrest, whether resistance was encountered, whether weapons were used, and what charges may be made
 - (3) The identity of the arresting officers (unless undercover)

- (4) 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 of 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 factual 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 in an attempt to ensure that live broadcasts do not disclose any information that could endanger law enforcement personnel or the general public.
- f. In incidents involving other jurisdictions or agencies, Grand Rapids police personnel shall only speak to our Department's involvement in cooperation with other agencies.
- g. Prior to the names of Department employees being released to the media, the involved employees will be made of aware of the impending release.

5. Special Considerations – Non-criminal Matters

- a. Media representatives should not be prevented from access to any area solely because of the possibility of their injury or death. If this is the only consideration, the media representative should be advised of the danger and allowed to make the decision to enter on his or her own volition.
- b. Sensitive information relating to Internal Affairs Investigations or civil litigation shall not be released without the permission of the Chief of Police.
- c. Media representatives shall be denied access to the contents of investigative or incident reports where release of the information would:
 - (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.

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

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 affected employee(s) and their supervisors.
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.