

Greer Police Department

General Order 640.1 Public Information

This order consists of the following numbered sections:

- I. PUBLIC INFORMATION FUNCTION
- II. MEDIA RELATIONS

By Order of: *Matt Hamby*
Chief of Police

April 27, 2023

CALEA 54.1.1; 54.1.2; 54.1.3; 54.1.4

I. PUBLIC INFORMATION FUNCTION

- A. The Police Department shall have a public information function which shall provide for the following:
 - 1. Assisting media personnel in covering news stories at the scene of incidents.
 - 2. Preparing and distributing Department media releases.
 - 3. Arranging for, conducting and/or assisting at Department media conferences.
 - 4. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information regarding victims, witnesses and suspects, confidential police investigations and operations.
 - 5. Developing procedures for releasing information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort.
 - 6. Informing the community about agency activities, neighborhood safety concerns, organizational programs, and other agency functions
- B. The public information function includes situations where the media is interested in police operations as well as situations where the Department wishes to generate media interest.
- C. Responsibility for Public Information
 - 1. The responsibility for the public information function rests ultimately with the Chief of Police, or in his absence, the designated Captain.
 - 2. The Chief of Police may designate an officer to act as the Public Information Officer (PIO). The designated officer will be responsible for the release of information pertaining to special events, unusual occurrences and catastrophes. When the PIO is not available, the Assistant Public Information Officer will assume responsibility for release of information to the media. The PIO and Assistant PIO shall receive training specific to that function.
 - 3. When other public service agencies are involved in an incident, i.e., fire department, coroner and other law enforcement agencies, the PIO will serve as coordinator by referring media to the appropriate agencies, organizing mutual media releases and maintaining contact with their respective PIOs to insure an accurate, coordinated release of information.

II. MEDIA RELATIONS

- A. Media Releases
 - 1. The PIO will determine the frequency and content of media releases.
 - 2. Media release information will be provided to the media when it becomes available, is organized and is determined to be of importance to the media.

3. The PIO will make all media release information available to all media sources on an equal basis.
4. The PIO will coordinate with the appropriate personnel to include the Assistant PIO to determine the appropriate information to be released or posted on the department's social media sites. No information will be posted in social media without approval of the PIO or Assistant PIO unless directed by the Chief of Police or Bureau Captain.

B. Persons Authorized to Release Information

1. Although the responsibility for the release of information ultimately rests with the Chief of Police, any officer may release information to the media at the scene of an incident, from police files concerning an on-going investigation, and/or at any time that the public information officer or his designee is not available, provided that the release meets the criteria set forth in this General Order.
2. All personnel should, whenever possible, forward information to the next higher level of command for review prior to releasing the information.

C. Guidelines for Recognizing Media Credentials

The Greer Police Department does not issue press credentials but shall recognize credentials identifying members of the press unless there is sufficient reason to believe that those credentials are false. Personnel of the media will govern their actions at the scene of an incident in accordance with existing state law and city ordinance and will be subject to criminal prosecution if they violate those laws. Any misconduct on the part of media members will be reported to the Chief of Police.

D. Media Access at Incidents

The access of media to all incident scenes shall be controlled by the officer in charge of the incident.

- a. The media will not be allowed past the perimeter of a scene established for the general public.
- b. The media shall not be allowed to photograph, film, or videotape on private property without the consent of the owner, occupant, or agent of the private property.

E. Media Involvement in Press Policies

The media will be encouraged to submit comments and recommendations concerning development of policies and procedures relating to media relations. The Greer Police Department values a good rapport with the media and has an appreciation of the problems they confront in their daily work.

F. Guidelines for Disseminating Public Information

1. In instances where members of the Department are either actively involved in or have just concluded a police action, care should be exercised before talking with media representatives.

- a. Officers should be aware that their first obligation is to the investigation at hand and that reports containing important information should be completed before conversing with the media.
 - b. Officers should confer with a supervisor if they have any questions as to what information is appropriate to be released concerning a police action.
2. The release of information to the media shall be in conjunction with the following guidelines:
- a. Information released prior to arrest:
 - (1) Information that is of a factual nature.
 - (2) Edited information concerning criminal acts or traffic accidents that is contained in the face of the offense report or traffic accident report forms.
 - (3) A brief description of the exact offense to include location, time, injuries sustained - to the extent allowable by federal law, or damages resulting from the incident.
 - (4) Whether there are suspects or not.
 - (5) Information concerning unidentified suspects to include a general description and other pertinent information.
 - (6) Identification and photograph of a fugitive for whom a warrant has been issued.
 - (7) The criminal background of a suspect if the public should be alerted.
 - (8) The name of the officer in charge of the investigation.
 - (9) The identity of victims and witnesses, under the parameters of freedom of information and other legal controls.
 - b. Information not released prior to arrest.
 - (1) Information that is speculative in nature.
 - (2) Exact information concerning an ongoing investigation, whether it be a crime or traffic accident, shall not be released if the information would jeopardize the investigation or the prosecution of a suspect.
 - (3) The identity of suspects who are interviewed but not charged will not be released.
 - (4) Information on matters that are currently in litigation in the courts, both criminal and civil in nature.
 - (5) Information that may incur liability on the City.

- c. Information that can be released after an arrest:
 - (1) The arrestee's name, age, sex, race, residence and charges.
 - (2) The circumstances surrounding the arrest, such as the time and place of arrest, resistance, pursuit, and the use of weapons.
 - (3) The name of the arresting officer and the duration of the investigation.
 - (4) Scheduled dates for various stages of the judicial process.
 - (5) Mug shots may be released if this information would not jeopardize or hinder the outcome of a case.

- d. Information not released after arrest.
 - (1) Information regarding the character, reputation or prior criminal record of the defendant.
 - (2) Confessions, statements or refusal of same by the accused.
 - (3) Results of any tests taken by or given to the arrestee.
 - (4) Results of any laboratory tests or examinations regarding evidence at crime scenes.
 - (5) Information of a speculative nature or any remarks concerning the guilt or innocence of the accused.
 - (6) The identity of informants.
 - (7) Re-enactment of the crime or information from the accused directing officers to the location of evidence or contraband.
 - (8) The identity, credibility of statements or prospective witnesses.
 - (9) Information received from other law enforcement agencies without prior approval from the contributing agencies.
 - (10) Information from police personnel regarding the merits of the case or the quality of evidence gathered.

- e. Information that will not be released to media:
 - (1) The identity of sexual assault victims.
 - (2) The identity of juvenile offenders, unless charged as adults.
 - (3) Information regarding personnel of the Police Department. All inquiries will be directed to the City Human Resource Director.
 - (4) Information regarding internal affairs type investigations. This information will only be released with approval of the City Attorney.

(5) The identity of a deceased person. All media inquires regarding the identity of a deceased person will be referred to the appropriate County Coroner.

f. Release of Information by Officers other than the Public Information Officer.

When information is disseminated to the media by any officer or employee other than the Public Information Officer, the officer releasing the information will notify the Public Information Officer as soon as practical of the content of the material released, who released the material, and when it was released.

g. Multiple jurisdictions (responsibilities for release of information).

In instances in which more than one agency is involved, the agency having primary jurisdiction shall be responsible for releasing or coordinating the release of information.

h. Freedom of Information requests or requests from attorneys for information for civil procedures will be handled by the Support Services Bureau (Records, and/or Support Services Captain). The Support Services Captain will keep the Chief of Police informed of such requests as appropriate.

i. Information requests from any person outside the Department, i.e. people wanting crime statistics for a neighborhood or calls for service to a specific address; city officials; attorneys; other law enforcement jurisdictions, etc. will be directed to the Support Services Bureau (Records, Crime Analysis, Support Services Captain). The PIO will be consulted as needed. To insure that only accurate, documented statistics are released, Department employees will not give anecdotal information or their opinion to persons requesting information.