



GENERAL ORDER

Loudoun County Sheriff's Office

Chapter: Operations	Section: 410.1
Subject: Public Information	Topic: Public Information
Accreditation: A.20.01, 20.02, 20.03, 22.01, 22.02, 22.03	Revised:
Enacted: 07/30/2015	Reaffirmed:
Last Review: 10/22/2018	Review: 4/1/2020

I. PURPOSE

The Loudoun County Sheriff's Office must have the support of the community in order to be a successful law enforcement agency. The purpose of this General Order is to outline how the Sheriff's Office will establish and maintain an effective relationship with the news media and inform the community and news media of public events.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office to cooperate with the news media and to maintain an atmosphere of transparency and proactive communication in keeping with applicable provisions of state and local law. A positive working relationship with the media is mutually beneficial. Information shall be released to the news media in an impartial, accurate and timely fashion. It is the responsibility of each employee to support this philosophy of cooperation.

The provisions of this Order shall be applicable to the release of all official information of the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office to include, but not be limited to, statistical data, records, complaints, cases and statements of agency position.

III. ORGANIZATION FOR THE DISSEMINATION OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

- A. The Media Relations and Communications Manager ("PIO Manager") and the Public Information Officer ("PIO") support the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office and its personnel in matters involving the news media. To accomplish this, both the PIO Manager and the PIO will be available during normal business hours as well as on-call for emergencies and other critical incidents. The PIO Manager will act as the primary contact for the news media. The PIO will assume the responsibilities of the PIO Manager, set forth below, in his/her absence.
- B. The Staff Duty Officer, ranking field supervisor, Traffic Safety supervisor and/or Criminal Investigations Division supervisor shall be responsible for ensuring that the PIO Manager is immediately informed of major incidents and all other events that may generate media interest within his/her field of responsibility. The PIO Manager will then coordinate any release of information with the Sheriff or, in the absence of the Sheriff, his/her Undersheriff. The PIO will be referred to in parentheses throughout this section to reflect the PIO as the secondary contact.

- C. The senior agency official present should attempt to make contact with the PIO Manager (PIO) as soon as possible and provide a brief synopsis of the situation. If time permits, the presence of the PIO Manager (PIO) should be requested via pager and/or cellular phone.
- D. No situational summaries should be provided to any media outlets or representatives without approval from the Sheriff or, in his/her absence, the Undersheriff acting on behalf of the Sheriff, after coordination with the PIO Manager (PIO).
 - 1. Emergency Communications Center personnel should inform the PIO Manager (PIO) immediately of media inquiries, but may, with approval from the Sheriff, Chief Deputies, or PIO Manager/PIO, provide information to the news media in accordance with current ECC directives and General Order 413.4, Privacy and Security Act for Criminal History Information.
 - 2. Adult Detention Center personnel must contact the PIO Manager (PIO) to release information that is considered a matter of public record regarding individuals in custody who have been arrested and charged, including name (if an adult) and status of the charge or arrest.

IV. PROCEDURES

- A. Responsibility for Releasing Information
 - 1. The PIO Manager is the primary contact for the news media. The following functions are duties of the PIO Manager:
 - a. Assist news personnel in covering routine news stories and at the scene of incidents
 - b. Be available for on-call responses to the news media at all times
 - c. Prepare and distribute agency news releases
 - d. Arrange for and assist at news conferences
 - e. Assist during crisis situations within the agency. The PIO Manager and his/her designee shall assist command activities by relaying necessary public information
 - f. Coordinate and authorize the release of information regarding victims, witnesses and suspects
 - 2. Bureau Commander and/or Division Commanders – Bureau Commanders and/or Division Commanders with responsibility for a specific case/incident may get approval from the Sheriff, or in his/her absence the Chief Deputy

acting on behalf of the Sheriff, to be the secondary contact for the news media following coordination with the PIO.

3. Other Employees – The Sheriff or Chief Deputies may request other employees to respond to media requests as deemed appropriate and only after coordination with the Sheriff, PIO Manager, or, in his/her absence, the PIO.

B. Media Inquiries

The Sheriff's Office will respond to all routine media inquiries in a timely and professional manner. All media inquiries shall be directed to the PIO Manager or, in his/her absence, the PIO.

C. Interviews

1. The PIO Manager or, in his/her absence, the PIO, is responsible for working with the media in arranging or coordinating interviews as appropriate. Employees contacted directly by the media for interviews shall notify the PIO Manager or, in his/her absence the PIO, of any interview requests. The PIO Manager/PIO, in coordination with the Sheriff or the Chief Deputy acting on behalf of the Sheriff, will then decide as to whether or not to allow such an interview.
 - a. All conversations with members of the news media should be considered "on the record" with the possibility of being quoted.
 - b. The PIO Manager or, in his/her absence, the PIO, may, upon authorization by the Sheriff, request deputies or other employees with first-hand knowledge of a particular Sheriff's Office activity, to provide an interview directly to the media. Should an employee agree to do this, either the PIO Manager or PIO will be present for the interview.

D. News Releases

News releases shall be written and disseminated to the media and within the agency on major incidents, crimes or events of community interest or concern. The Sheriff, upon coordination with the PIO Manager or, in his/her absence the PIO, shall approve all news releases in advance of dissemination. Routine news releases, such as arrest data or suspect lockouts, may be released by the PIO Manager or, in his/her absence, the PIO. Prior to dissemination of a news release concerning an active investigation, the PIO Manager or, in his/her absence, the PIO, shall first confer with the lead investigator/deputy to ensure that no information that may jeopardize a successful investigation/prosecution is disseminated to the public.

The Sheriff's Office may pursue alternative methods of disseminating information directly to the public. These additional methods may include community newsletters, government access cable television shows, web sites, electronic alerts, public appearances by agency members, public area bulletin boards, etc. All routine communications must be approved by the Sheriff, PIO Manager or, in his/her absence, the PIO.

E. News Conferences

News Conferences will be held only in connection with major events of concern to the community. The Sheriff may initiate a News Conference and will be informed of all potential news conference requests. The PIO Manager or, in his/her absence, the PIO, will facilitate the news conference, which may include the Sheriff or his designee.

At critical incident scenes, members of the Sheriff's Office will 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 general public.

F. Access to Crime Scenes, Critical Incidents and Suspects

Sheriff's Office personnel shall be courteous to news media representatives who are actively covering a crime or critical incident scene, i.e. natural disasters, major fires or other catastrophic events.

1. In accordance with Virginia State Code §15.2-1714, any police line or barricade erected for incident scenes shall be clearly identified by wording such as "Police Line – DO NOT CROSS" or other similar wording. If material or equipment is not available for identifying the prohibited area, then a verbal warning by identifiable law-enforcement officials positioned to indicate a location of a police line or barricade shall be given to any person or persons attempting to cross police lines or barricades without proper authorization. Such scene may be secured no longer than is reasonably necessary to affect the purposes for which the police line was established. Nothing in this section shall limit or otherwise affect the authority of, or be construed to deny access to such scene by any person charged by law with the responsibility of rendering assistance at or investigating any such fires, accidents, wrecks, explosions, crimes or riots.

a. When present for the purpose of gathering news, personnel from media outlets (including print, radio and television), may request access to an active crime scene. This access shall not be permitted by the deputies present until the scene has been fully processed and an on-scene supervisor determines that the scene is safe to enter, so as to prevent contamination and preserve the scene.

b. The Sheriff's Office has no standing to invite the media onto private

property without the consent of the property owner or person in charge of the property, or to assist in securing permission for access from property owners.

- c. No member of the agency may prohibit the media from newsgathering practices, including photography and interviews, outside the established perimeter of the scene. If the event involves juveniles, deputies at the scene should notify the media in order to help prevent an unintended publication of juvenile photographs.
2. Suspects or accused persons in custody shall not be posed or made available for media interviews. Following incarceration, arrangements for interviews with inmates are the responsibility of the Corrections and Court Services Division Commander, in conjunction with the Sheriff's approval.
 3. Members of the agency will take no action to either discourage or encourage the media in photographing or televising within the view of a crime scene or the scene of any Sheriff's Office operation. This shall include, but not be limited to, the photographing or televising of a suspect being taken into custody or being transported, with the exception of juveniles, a victim, or evidence.
 - a. A media cameraperson will not be permitted any closer access than any other media representatives.
 - b. Evidence may be covered or removed, witnesses removed, precautions taken to preserve a scene or safeguard the plans and activities of a tactical response or protect the integrity of the investigation prior to admitting news media to a scene.
 4. The Sheriff, Chief Deputies or the PIO Manager or, in his/her absence, the PIO may release information at crime/critical incident scenes.
 - a. At crime/critical incident scenes, the Sheriff or PIO Manager or, in his/her absence, the PIO or scene/incident commander, will establish a media briefing area as close to the scene as safety and operational requirements permit.
 - b. At critical incident scenes, agency members will 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 general public.

G. Joint Investigations/Other Agency Involvement

In a multi-jurisdictional investigation, the lead investigative agency will be responsible for providing or coordinating the release of public information. The lead agency's

PIO will share that information with all involved agencies in advance of public dissemination. Responsibility for the conduct of public information activities normally is assumed on the same basis as responsibility for public safety response to the incident.

1. The Sheriff's Office is responsible for the control of news media access and release of information at incidents that involve crime and criminal investigations.
2. Loudoun County Fire & Rescue is generally responsible for the control of news media access at fires or incidents in which rescue is the immediate concern.
3. In instances when another agency may have had an initial response to a scene but Sheriff's Office staff becomes the primary investigators for a criminal incident, then the responsibility for release of all law enforcement information shall rest with the Sheriff's Office, except as may be specifically directed by the Sheriff.

V. INFORMATION RELEASING GUIDELINES

The release of information is subject to restrictions placed by applicable state and federal laws. Further, any information that would hamper the successful conclusion of an investigation or jeopardize the safety of affected persons will not be released.

- A. The following information may be released to news media in criminal matters subject to restrictions contained elsewhere herein or in General Order 413.4, Privacy and Security Act for Criminal History Information:
 1. An arrestee's name, if over the age of 18, age, gender, and town/city of residence
 2. The status of the charge or charges
 3. The identities of the investigating and arresting agencies and the length of the investigation
 4. The general circumstances immediately surrounding an arrest
 5. The general circumstances surrounding a crime
 6. The age, gender and general area of the offense only in the case of juvenile offenders
 7. The age and gender of a rape/sex offense victim and general location of the offense

8. Any information contained in a public record (e.g. executed search warrant) filed with a court
 9. That an investigation is in progress and the general scope of that investigation
- B. The following information will not be released to the news media in criminal matters:
1. Information that may jeopardize the successful conclusion of an investigation or prosecution
 2. Active criminal investigative information, active criminal intelligence information or surveillance techniques
 3. Names of informants or information provided by an informant
 4. Names or identification of undercover personnel
 5. Names, addresses or other information that would lead to the specific identity of juvenile offenders
 6. Names, addresses or current location of any victims of sex offenses
 7. Names and/or addresses of witnesses to crimes
 8. Identity of a person charged with a crime, but not yet arrested, unless public assistance is sought in locating the individual, or to warn the public of any dangers the individual may present
 9. The identity of a critically injured or deceased person prior to notification of next-of-kin. The agency will notify the next-of-kin first and obtain a positive identification of a deceased victim of a criminal act or accident (motor vehicle or otherwise) prior to releasing the name and address to the news media. Notification of next-of-kin of a living and seriously injured victim of a criminal act or accident will be made before releasing the name and address to the news media. If the next-of-kin has not been located after a reasonable length of time as determined by an information releasing authority, the information may be released
 10. Names and precise addresses of residential burglary victims unless specifically authorized by an information releasing authority
 11. Home addresses, telephone numbers or familial information of law enforcement personnel
 12. Numbers for cellular telephones, pagers, or comparable portable communication devices provided to Sheriff's Office personnel for use in the

performance of their official duties

13. Statements related to the character, reputation or prior criminal record of an arrested person or a prospective witness, or any opinion as to the guilt or innocence of an accused
 14. The existence or contents of any admissions, confessions or statements attributable to an accused person, or failure to make a statement
 15. The performance or the results of any examinations or tests, or the refusal of the accused to take any examinations or tests or participate in a lineup
 16. Statements that concern the identity, credibility or anticipated testimony of prospective witnesses
 17. Grand jury testimony and/or proceedings
 18. The possibility of a plea of guilty to the offense charged or to a lesser offense or any other disposition
 19. Opinions concerning evidence or any argument in a case whether or not it is anticipated that the evidence or argument will be used at trial
 20. The existence or contents of any suicide note; the name of the person who attempted to commit suicide or was successful in such attempt; or other information that would lead to the identity of such person
 21. The amount of money taken in a robbery, except for general descriptors such as "small amount" at the discretion of any information releasing authority
 22. Active internal affairs investigations as governed by state law
 23. Other information that may be prohibited by Virginia law from being publicly disclosed
 24. Any other information deemed inappropriate for release by the Sheriff
- C. Non-crime related information in the following categories may be released:
1. With review and approval of the Sheriff, a Chief Deputy acting on the Sheriff's behalf or a Bureau Commander, organizational or policy changes or major personnel changes, provided that the information has been previously released to members of the Sheriff's Office
 2. Human-interest stories concerning the Sheriff's Office or its personnel after coordination through the PIO Manager, or, in his/her absence, the PIO and with

authorization from the Sheriff

3. Accidents, natural disasters, other calamities, or other incidents of public interest
4. Subject to legal restrictions and adequate notification, the PIO Manager/PIO may provide photographs of newsworthy events to the news media
5. Activities sponsored by the Sheriff's Office that are of interest to the public (parades, quarterly meetings, etc.)

D. Social Networking Internet Sites

1. Whenever the agency establishes a social networking site on the Internet, the PIO Manager or, in his/her absence, the PIO, or other employees designated by the PIO Manager with authorization of the Sheriff, shall be responsible for posting relevant Sheriff's Office bulletins, news releases, community events, etc. to the site and reviewing comments posted on the agency's page.
2. The agency's page is available for comment, relevant to the business of the agency or responsive to a posting. As comments may be posted by the public, it may be expected that not all postings will be positive and/or favorable to the LCSO.
 - a. One advantage to social media networking is that it establishes a space where interested citizens can share criticism with the Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff's Office can learn about its real or perceived shortcomings and respond accordingly, either by disseminating correct information, offering an explanation or changing its actions and then reporting the change.
 - b. Except as outlined below, the PIO Manager (PIO) will monitor the site and shall not remove comments from the site except during periodic housekeeping associated with past or outdated events.
3. The agency's social networking site will not be used for inappropriate comments that attack or insult an individual or group. Examples of inappropriate comments are those containing profanity, obscenity, defamation, or remarks disparaging people based on race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or national origin.
 - a. The PIO Manager (PIO) will remove inappropriate comments from the web page as soon as they are discovered. The best approach is to remove the entire post or comment, not just a portion of it.
 - b. The PIO Manager (PIO) should log the inappropriate comment, as well

as the date, time and individual responsible for the content, before removing it. If any individual repeatedly posts inappropriate comments, the PIO Manager (PIO) shall disqualify that site follower.

4. The Monitoring Employee shall review the social networking page(s) at least daily to check for any new comments, if applicable. If a topic shows a great deal of activity, the Monitoring Employee should check more often than once a day. Posted photographs shall also be reviewed for comments as well as Sheriff's Office topics or news. If feasible, the Monitoring Employee should employ website settings that will send alerts to an email address when an incoming comment is posted.
5. If possible, the Monitoring Employee should post the guidelines for comments from this General Order on the site where they will be available to users, without detracting from the communicative purpose of the site.

VI. MEDIA RIDE ALONGS

Media ride alongs allow members of the media to accompany a deputy sheriff while he/she performs law enforcement functions. Media ride-along requests will be handled by the PIO Manager or, in his/her absence, the PIO. The standard Ride Along Request form with liability waiver must be completed. Once a request is received, the Sheriff, Bureau Commander or Field Operations Division Commander may approve the request based upon the recommendation of the PIO Manager or his/her designee.

- A. All ride alongs will take place in a Sheriff's Office vehicle. Under no circumstance will the media be permitted to follow a Sheriff's Office vehicle in a private vehicle
- B. No deputy shall initiate or participate in any pursuit with a civilian as a passenger in a law enforcement vehicle, to include a member of the media

VII. MEETINGS WITH THE MEDIA

Reaffirming the Sheriff's Office's commitment to positive media relations, the Sheriff, the PIO Manager, and the PIO shall meet on a regular basis with media representatives to discuss issues of mutual interest or concern. Proposed or anticipated changes in agency policy or procedures dealing with the media also will be addressed at this time.

VIII. PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

- A. Associations with other area Public Information Officers

The Loudoun County Sheriff's Office is committed to ensuring the PIO Manager and/or PIO will function as part of mutual aid support with other law enforcement agencies and will also participate in and support professional associations and organizations.

B. Law Enforcement/Media Associations

The Loudoun County Sheriff's Office will participate in regional law enforcement/media associations to further understanding between the two professions.

IX. ETHICS

As with all citizens, Sheriff's Office employees shall treat members of the media with respect, dignity and professionalism.

If a deputy at the scene of a Sheriff's Office event has reason to question the status or actions of any person who claims to be a media representative, instructions should be sought from a supervisory deputy or the PIO Manager or, in his/her absence, the PIO, if available, or, if appropriate, the Loudoun County Fire and Rescue Officer in charge.

Any employee having a complaint regarding the conduct of any news media representative should forward such complaint to the PIO Manager or, in his/her absence, the PIO or his/her designee. He/she will receive and record the complaint and make such investigation as may be deemed appropriate. If the complaint is found to be valid, the Sheriff will forward a letter to the news media representative specifying a complaint was made and substantiated, and request that the specific representative avoid such conduct in future contact with the agency. A second substantiated complaint against the same representative will be brought to the attention of appropriate management personnel of the news media organization.

X. ANNUAL REPORTS AND SURVEYS

The PIO Manager is responsible for compiling, preparing and distributing the following reports and surveys:

A. A quarterly report that is available to the public through the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office website and includes, at a minimum, the following elements detailing the previous quarter's information:

1. Agency statistics
2. Agency activities

This report will be posted on the website quarterly.

B. A biennial survey of citizen attitudes and opinions that include the following elements:

1. Overall agency performance
2. Overall competence of agency employees

3. Deputies' attitudes and behavior toward citizens
4. Concerns over safety and security within Loudoun County as a whole
5. Recommendations and suggestions for improvement

The survey will be used as an internal mechanism to update goals and objectives; institute training; review agency effectiveness; explore the need for new programs or discontinue old programs; address citizen concerns, etc. This information will be gathered through continual monitoring of traditional and social media feedback.