



GENERAL ORDER

Loudoun County Sheriff's Office

Chapter: Operations

Section: 410.1

Subject: Public Information

Topic: Public Information

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I. PURPOSE

In furtherance of its success as a law enforcement agency, the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office strives to build a constructive relationship with all stakeholders, specifically the community-at-large and the news media. The purpose of this General Order is to outline how the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office will maintain effective relationships with our constituents and the various stakeholders we serve, with the goal of communicating about law enforcement and public safety matters in a relevant, accurate, timely, and accessible manner.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office to communicate with the community-at-large and the news media consistent with the agency's General Orders and practices, as well as in accordance with federal, state, and local law..

The provisions of this Order shall apply 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, incident and case information, and statements of agency policy or practice.

III. ORGANIZATION FOR THE DISSEMINATION OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

- A. The Loudoun County Sheriff's Office Media Relations and Communications Section ("PIO") supports the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office in matters involving the dissemination of information to the news media and community-at-large. To accomplish this, a representative of the PIO shall be available during normal business hours and on-call for emergencies and other exigent incidents, as well as events that occur after hours, on weekends and holidays. The PIO Director, Media Relations and Communications or, in his/her absence, the PIO Manager, Media Relations and Communications shall act as the primary contact for the community-at-large and the news media.
- B. The Duty Officer, ranking field supervisor, Traffic Safety supervisor and/or Criminal Investigations Division supervisor shall be responsible for ensuring that the PIO is immediately informed of major incidents and all other events that may generate news media and/or community interest within his/her field of responsibility. The PIO shall coordinate any release of information with the Sheriff or his/her designee.
- C. The senior agency official present at any emergency or other exigent incident shall contact the PIO as soon as possible to provide a synopsis and status of the incident. If

requested and time permits, the physical presence of the PIO on-site may be requested. Alternatively, the PIO may deem that a physical presence is appropriate and designate one or more members of the PIO team for such purpose.

- D. In instances of an emergency or other exigent incident, no situational information shall be provided to the community-at-large or news media by the PIO without prior approval from the Sheriff or his/her designee.
1. Emergency Communications Center personnel shall inform the PIO immediately of any news media inquiries, but may, with approval from the Sheriff or his/her designee, and the PIO, provide information to the news media and community-at-large in accordance with approved ECC protocols and [General Order 413.4, Privacy and Security Act for Criminal History Information](#).
 2. Adult Detention Center and Courts personnel shall contact the PIO before the release of any information that may be considered a matter of public record regarding individuals in custody who have been arrested and charged, including their name (if an adult) and status of the charge, arrest, or case disposition.

IV. PROCEDURES

A. Responsibility for Releasing Information

1. The PIO is the primary contact for the news media, and has the following duties:
 - a. Assist news media representatives in covering emergency or other exigent incidents as well as routine news stories.
 - b. Be available 24/7 for on-call responses to the news media.
 - c. Be available 24/7 to craft and publish agency news releases and other statements.
 - d. Arrange news conferences and assist with other forums where the news media may be present.
 - e. Coordinate the release of information regarding victims, witnesses, and/or suspects.
2. Bureau Commanders and/or Division Commanders with responsibility for a specific case/incident may be approved by the Sheriff or his/her designee to be a secondary contact for the news media in coordination with the PIO. Other agency employees may be approved by the Sheriff or his/her designee to assist

the PIO in responding to news media inquiries.

B. Media Inquiries

The Loudoun County Sheriff's Office shall respond to all news media inquiries in a timely and professional manner. All such inquiries shall be directed to the PIO.

C. Interviews

1. The PIO is responsible for working with the news media to coordinate interviews of or the release of any statement by agency personnel.
 - a. All conversations with members of the news media shall be considered "on the record", to include the possibility of being quoted with attribution.
 - b. The PIO, as approved by the Sheriff or his/her designee, may request agency personnel to participate in an interview or provide a statement to the news media. Should any personnel agree to do so, a member of the PIO shall be present for the interview.

D. News Releases, Social Media Posts, and Other Communications

News releases shall be written and disseminated when related to major crimes and other law enforcement matters, as well as events and agency accomplishments of community interest or concern. The Sheriff, upon coordination with the PIO, shall approve all news releases related to crimes and other law enforcement matters, as well as any news release or other communication where he is quoted. Routine news releases, such as arrest data or suspect lockouts, as well as those related to events and agency accomplishments, may be released by the PIO. Prior to the dissemination of a news release related to an active investigation, the PIO, shall confer with the lead investigator/deputy and supervisor to ensure that no information that may jeopardize a successful investigation/prosecution is disseminated.

The Sheriff's Office shall incorporate other methods of disseminating information to the public, including but not limited to posts on its social media platforms and use of its web site, electronic community alerts, community newsletters, public service messages, and public appearances. All such communications shall be approved in the same manner as described above.

E. Access to Crime Scenes, Critical Incidents, and Suspects

Sheriff's Office personnel shall be courteous to all news media representatives who are covering a crime remotely or at an incident scene. They shall define the scene perimeter to the news media and ensure that they remain there and do not interrupt investigative efforts.

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 the 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 scenes 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 news media outlets 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, 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 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 Division Commander, in coordination with the Sheriff or his/her designee.
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, except in the case of a juvenile, a victim, or the appearance of evidence.

F. Joint Investigations and Other Agency Involvement

In a multi-jurisdictional investigation, the lead investigative agency shall be responsible for providing or coordinating the release of public information. The lead agency's PIO or other agency designee shall be expected to share that information with all involved agencies in advance of dissemination to the news media and public.

1. The Loudoun County Sheriff's Office is responsible for managing news media access and releasing information at incidents that involve a crime or criminal investigation.
2. The Loudoun County Combined Fire and Rescue System is generally responsible for the management of news media access and the release of information regarding fires or other incidents where rescue is the immediate or primary 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 the release of all law enforcement information shall rest with the Sheriff's Office, except as may be specifically directed by the Sheriff or his/her designee.

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 and the general public related to 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, age (if over the age of 18), gender, and town/city of residence.
 2. The status of the charge(s) filed.
 3. The name of the investigating and/or arresting agency or agencies and the length of the investigation.
 4. The general circumstances immediately surrounding an investigation, crime and/or arrest.
 5. The age, gender and general area of the offense only in the case of a juvenile offender.
 6. The age, gender, and general location of the offense only in the case of a

rape/sex offense victim.

7. Any information contained in a public record filed with a court, such as an executed search warrant.

B. The following information shall not be released to the news media or community at-large in criminal matters:

1. Information that may jeopardize the successful conclusion of an investigation or prosecution.
2. Active criminal investigative information, criminal intelligence information, or surveillance techniques.
3. The name of an informant or information provided by an informant.
4. The name or identification of any undercover personnel.
5. The name, addresses, or other information that could lead to the specific identity of a juvenile offender.
6. The name, addresses, or current location of any victim of a sex offense.
7. The names and/or addresses of any witness to a crime.
8. The identity of any 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 danger associated with the individual.
9. The identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to notification of next-of-kin. The agency shall obtain a positive identification of a deceased, living, or seriously injured victim of a criminal act or accident (prior to releasing the name and address to the news media. If next-of-kin has not been located after a reasonable length of time, the information may be released subject to approval of the Sheriff or his/her designee.
10. The name and address of a residential burglary victim unless specifically authorized by the Sheriff or his/her designee.
11. The home address, telephone number, and/or familial information about any law enforcement personnel.
12. Any statements related to the character, reputation, or prior criminal record of an arrested person or prospective witness, and/or any opinion as to the guilt or innocence of an accused person.

13. The existence or contents of any admission, confession, or statement attributable to an accused person, or their failure to make such a statement.
 14. The conduct and/or results of any examination, test, or lineup by an accused person, or the refusal of that person to participate in any of these.
 15. Any statement regarding the identity, credibility, or anticipated testimony of a prospective witness.
 16. Grand jury testimony and/or proceedings.
 17. The possibility of a plea of guilty to the offense charged or to a lesser offense or any other possible disposition of a case.
 18. Any opinion concerning evidence or argument in a case whether it is anticipated that the evidence or argument will be used at trial.
 19. The name of the person who attempted to commit suicide or was successful in such attempt, and the existence or contents of any suicide note or other information that could lead to the identity of such person.
 20. The amount of money taken in a robbery, except for general descriptors such as "small amount" at the discretion of any information releasing authority.
 21. Any active internal affairs investigation.
 22. Any other information that may be prohibited by law from being publicly disclosed.
 23. Any other information deemed inappropriate for release by the Sheriff or his/her designee.
- C. Non-crime-related information may be released to the news media and community-at-large, including the following:
1. Organizational, policy, or major personnel initiatives or changes at the agency, in coordination with the PIO Director or, in his/her absence, the PIO Manager and subject to the approval of the Sheriff or his/her designee.
 2. Human-interest stories concerning the agency or its personnel in coordination with the PIO and subject to the approval of the Sheriff or his/her designee.
 3. Any other activities or matters involving the Sheriff's Office that may be of interest to the news media and public in coordination with the PIO.

VI. QUARTERLY AND OTHER REPORTS

The PIO shall be responsible for compiling, writing, and publishing a quarterly report that is provided to the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors, and made available to the news media and public that includes the following elements regarding the previous quarter of agency performance:

1. Agency highlights.
2. Significant criminal incidents and/or arrests.
3. Agency and personnel accomplishments, recognitions, and community activities.
4. Agency call for service and crime statistics.
5. Regional station statistics.
6. Courts Division highlights and statistics.
7. Corrections Division highlights and statistics.

Upon approval from the Sheriff or his designee, the PIO may publish other regular reports about crime statistics and relevant incidents or make such information available through electronic or other means, in furtherance of transparency and communication with the community-at-large and the news media.

VII. COURTESY, RESPECT, AND PROFESSIONALISM

Sheriff's Office personnel shall treat members of the community-at-large and the news media with courtesy, respect, and professionalism.

Any complaint about such treatment, and specifically about the conduct of anyone identified as a member of the news media, shall be documented in writing, and promptly brought to the attention of the PIO for review and determination of the appropriate action.