




City of Manassas Police Department

General Duty Manual



Effective Date: 12-23-2008	GENERAL ORDER	Number: 01-16
Subject: Public Information		
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Accreditation Standards: 54.1.1 / 54.1.2 / 54.1.3 / 54.1.4	By Authority Of:  Douglas W. Keen, Chief of Police	Total Pages: 6

PURPOSE:

To establish guidelines to provide the timely dissemination of information to the media and others.

POLICY:

The Department conducts its affairs as openly as possible. Information should be provided to members of the media in a timely manner and in compliance with laws and ordinances governing privacy and freedom of information. Information that will not jeopardize the further investigation or prosecution of a case or the ultimate apprehension of suspects should be given to members of the media. Efforts should be made to accommodate credentialed members of the media appearing on the scene of a crime or police operation, while simultaneously protecting the integrity of that scene or operation.

DISCUSSION:

An informed citizen is a helpful citizen. When the Department is open, honest, and candid in its interactions with the media and the public, a greater level of public support is the likely result. The media can be quite helpful in properly providing information that may affect the safety and general welfare of the community.

The Chief of Police appoints the Department Public Information Officer (PIO), but will normally be a member of the Community Services Section (CSS). The Chief of Police may appoint part-time PIOs based upon staffing levels. Part-time PIOs will be managed by CSS.

PROCEDURE:

I. The Public Information Function

- A. The public information function is one that every member of the Department may become involved in, depending on the circumstances surrounding a given situation. Accordingly, each member must be fully aware of the procedures governing the release of information, and by whom it may be released.
- B. The Chief of Police, as the originator of policy, may offer comments or responses to the media or public, as deemed necessary and appropriate and in compliance with legal restraints. When this is done, the PIO is notified.
- C. The PIO is the primary media spokesperson having daily contact with newsmen regarding newsworthy events. The PIO may respond to scenes beyond the control of duty supervisors.
- D. Division Commanders occasionally communicate directly with newsmen on matters referred by the PIO.
- E. Duty supervisors are responsible for initial contact with newsmen during the absence of command level officials or the PIO, particularly during the evening and midnight shifts. The PIO may be called to the scene of any event when the duty supervisor determines the media relations function would be better served by the PIO. In the absence of the PIO, duty supervisors may prepare a preliminary news briefing for use by the Public Safety Communications Center (PSCC) members to field telephone calls from news organizations during times beyond normal business hours.
- F. The PSCC members and other non-sworn members may release information only from the prepared media release.

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- G. Members may only release information from a prepared media release unless specifically guided by a superior officer or the PIO.
- H. Supervisors are responsible for timely notification of the PIO of any information known by them to have been released to newsmen during their shift.
- I. Information released that is beyond the scope of a written news release or news information sheet should be in accordance with this directive and caution should be used to ensure that the information:
 - 1. Is within legal constraints.
 - 2. Does not interfere with evidence preservation.
 - 3. Will not interfere with police operations.
 - 4. Will not interfere with apprehension of suspects.
 - 5. Does not interfere with prosecution of a matter.
 - 6. Will not infringe on any individual's constitutional safeguards.
- J. Incidents likely to produce attention by newsmen include, but are not limited to:
 - 1. Homicide or malicious wounding.
 - 2. Kidnapping or abduction.
 - 3. Barricade or hostage situations.
 - 4. Bank robbery.
 - 5. Bombing / arson / incendiary devices.
 - 6. Fatal accidents.
 - 7. Significant / prolonged traffic problems.
 - 8. Use of deadly force.
 - 9. Child abuse / neglect / sexual assaults.
 - 10. Matters involving domestic animals or wildlife.
 - 11. Developments in the investigations of cold cases.
 - 12. Missing Endangered Persons and Juveniles.

II. Types of Information Released

- A. The following information from public access records may be released to newsmen by authorized members in accordance with this directive:
 - 1. The date of the event.
 - 2. The time of occurrence of the event.
 - 3. The victim's age, gender, and area of residence.
 - 4. The location of the event, with the following limitations:
 - a. The exact address of a business or government location.
 - b. The "hundred block" address of any residence.
 - 5. The type of incident.
 - 6. If injury was involved:
 - a. Who was injured (if the next of kin have been notified).
 - b. The location (where the injury occurred).
 - c. The type of injury.
 - d. The date and time of the injury.
 - e. A description of the precipitating incident.
 - f. Where the injured person was taken.
 - 7. If an arrest was made:
 - a. The arresting officer's name, unless circumstances require otherwise.
 - b. The identity of the arrestee (if they are an adult).
 - c. The date and time of the arrest.
 - d. The location of the arrest.
 - e. The charge(s) placed.
 - f. A general statement of the surrounding circumstances.
 - g. Whether a weapon was involved.
 - h. Bond information (if available).
 - i. The court date.
 - 8. General factual information concerning the status of an investigation.

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9. Information concerning a person who is considered dangerous and for whom warrants are on file, when the public should be notified for its protection, or when the release of information would assist in locating a suspect. Photographs of the wanted subject may be released.

III. Types of Information Not to be Released:

- A. The following information **shall not** be released to newsmen:
 1. The identification of juveniles who either as participants, witnesses, or victims, are involved in a crime as specified in Code of Virginia Sections 16.1-301 and 16.1-309.1.
 2. The identity of victims, unless such victims are deceased.
 - a. For deceased victims, exhaust all efforts to notify next of kin.
 3. The identity of witnesses.
 4. The identity of any confidential informant or undercover officer.
 5. Information that may impede the investigation or apprehension of the suspect.
 6. The identity of persons killed or injured in accidents, until the next of kin have been notified.
 7. The identity of criminal suspects, until a warrant or indictment has been issued.
 8. The type and amount of evidentiary items.
 9. In firearms-related cases, the type, caliber, number of rounds involved, etc.
 10. The amount of money taken during a robbery.
 11. The existence and nature of a suspect's prior criminal record (media should be referred to the court system).
 12. Information concerning the character or reputation of any individual.
 13. Information that may be contained in any confession, statement of guilt, or admission.
 14. The results of any test.
 15. Any personal opinions.
 16. The speed or estimated speed of any vehicular pursuit.
 17. Information received from another agency, except with the agency's consent.
 18. Joint operation information that is the responsibility of another agency (i.e., Medical Examiner's Office, Volunteer Fire Company, etc.), except with the agency's consent.
 19. Any personnel issues or Internal Affairs matters, without the prior approval of the Chief of Police.

IV. Who May Release Information

- A. In most circumstances deemed by the media to be newsworthy, the Department should anticipate some sort of on-scene response by the various types of news agencies (print, radio, television), and the duty supervisor should consider establishing a media staging area near the scene where newsmen may assemble and meet the PIO. The on-scene supervisor should consider how close to an active scene media should be allowed.
- B. All on-scene officers direct inquiries by the media to the on-scene supervisor (or superior officer at the scene), unless the PIO is present on the scene to take this responsibility.
- C. In the absence of the PIO, the on-scene supervisor may personally respond to media inquiries or designate that responsibility to another officer, who becomes the designated PIO for the incident.
- D. The responsibility for meeting the needs of the media falls upon the on-scene supervisor. The on-scene supervisor may, at their discretion, depending on the nature and extent of the incident, contact the PIO for a call-out, and relinquish media relations duties upon the PIO's arrival on the scene.
- E. Unless the PIO responds, the duty supervisor is responsible for preparing the media release for newsworthy or urgent release events occurring during their shift. This information should be forwarded to the PIO or their designee who have the capability of disseminating the release from off-site locations or reviewing and approving the release to be distributed by the supervisor.
- F. Media releases are formal, written statements or announcements that are prepared for incidents or arrests for which there may be significant public interest, or for programs or other events that the Department seeks to actively publicize. Members who feel an event or program is worthy of a media release request the release through their supervisor.

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G. Media Releases.

1. Are normally prepared by the PIO. Other members who are instructed to prepare a media release coordinate the preparation and release with the PIO.
2. Must be approved prior to release by a Division Commander or the Chief of Police.
3. Are disseminated to the various media organizations by the PIO using the Media/News Release E-mail Notification System. Should this system be unavailable and the news is urgent, the PIO maintains a list of phone contacts for the local media.
4. Contain a Department contact name and telephone number for further information.
5. The Media/News Release E-mail Notification System can access the whole department simultaneously. The media release is sent Department-wide with copies to pertinent city officials.
6. Are posted in the Patrol Services Division (PSD), so that all members are aware of the release.

V. **The Public Information Officer (PIO)**

- A. Not all contacts with the media take place at the scenes of incidents. The media's job often requires the gathering of follow-up information, the development of special reports deemed important to the public's interest, and the preparation of news stories that address the inner workings of the Department. In order to provide a focal point to which the media may direct its inquiries and control the flow of information, the position of PIO is established. The duties of the PIO include, but are not limited to:
 1. Assisting news personnel in covering stories at the scenes of incidents.
 2. Being available for on-call responses to media inquiries.
 3. Preparing and disseminating media releases.
 4. Arranging for, and assisting at news conferences.
 5. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects.
 6. Assisting in crisis situations with the Department.
 7. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential investigations and operations conducted by the Department.
 8. Developing procedures for releasing information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort.
 9. Developing guidelines and directives governing access of credentialed media to scenes of major fires, natural disasters, catastrophic events and crime scenes.
 10. Policies, specific to fire and rescue related calls will be developed in coordination with the Manassas City Fire and Rescue Department's Standard Operating Procedures (see Section VI).
 11. Notifying media of suggested changes in policies and procedures related to public information and allowing media representatives to participate in the development process.
 12. Daily contact with media officials.
 13. Central review of information given to the media by other members of the Department.
- B. The PIO ensures equal access of newsmen to Department information through the use of the Media/News Release E-mail Notification System. The PIO uses the instant access afforded by electronic communication to release newsworthy information in a timely manner. The PIO ensures that all regional news media agencies are represented in the contacts who receive e-mail notifications.
- C. Division Commanders, upon receipt of an inquiry from the news media that can not be handled by the PIO, may elect to answer the inquiry, provided the response is allowable by federal or state law, City ordinance, and/or Department policy; or delegate the response to a subordinate member of their division who has first-hand knowledge of a particular activity. Each member so designated makes every attempt to release the information requested. Division Commanders notify the PIO of any such interview. The PIO occasionally requests Division Commanders to allow specific members of their divisions to give a media release, participate in a news conference, assist in feature articles, or otherwise assist in the public information function.
- D. News conferences differ from media releases in that they require more of a question-and-answer format with multiple media members in attendance at a particular time. News conferences, when judiciously planned, can have a lasting effect upon the image of the Department. Further, they provide understanding in controversial issues; they can prepare the public for the implementation of new laws; and they can lessen the effect of rumors associated with organizational changes, Department policies, internal investigations,

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confidential operations, and exceptional programs or events. The PIO notifies the media as to the time, date, location, and subject matter of any news conferences called by the Department. Only the Chief of Police, or their designee, may authorize a news conference.

1. A media release shall be prepared for dissemination at all news conferences.
 2. The news conference should have a specific time limit set by the PIO in coordination with the Chief of Police.
 3. The Chief of Police should, in most instances, be the primary speaker at the news conference.
 4. Appropriate personnel should be present at the news conference to assist in answering questions.
- E. In certain situations, the services of a bilingual officer may be necessary in order to enhance a news conference, prepare a media release, or assist the PIO at the incident scene. In the event that the PIO is not bilingual, the Chief of Police may appoint a bilingual officer for such assistance.

VI. Media Credentials and Access to Incidents

- A. The Chief of Police may issue media credentials to media representatives. The Department also honors credentials issued or honored by other law enforcement agencies within the Metropolitan, D.C. area.
- B. The Chief of Police may revoke the Department-issued credentials of any media member, on a case by case basis, when the individual hinders operations or the efficiency of the Department in its public information initiatives.
- C. Media representatives who possess media credentials are allowed through police barricades or police lines intended to hold the public back, when approved by the on-scene supervisor, and provided that:
 1. Credentials are displayed on an outer garment.
 2. There is no endangerment to their safety, as determined by the on-scene supervisor.
 3. Access to barricaded and/or secured areas is limited to the period of time required to take photographs or video.
 4. No statements, interviews, or questions are entertained within the barricaded/secured area.
 5. Media representatives comply with all instructions issued by the on-scene supervisor and other officers on the scene.
 6. No entry is made within a designated crime scene area during a crime scene search.
- D. At the discretion of the on-scene supervisor, media may be allowed access within the outer perimeter of the crime scene, but not within the scene itself, provided there is no objection to their presence by the owner of the property involved.
- E. At the scene of fires or other incidents controlled by fire or rescue personnel, media representatives must obtain permission from the on-scene fire commander before entering barricaded/secured areas.
- F. Nothing in this directive allows a media representative to disregard posted parking regulations, or park a vehicle in such a manner as to interfere with the orderly flow of traffic or the conduct of official government business in or around the scene of an incident.
- G. Members shall not assist media representatives in gathering information, conducting interviews, taking photographs, carrying equipment, or any other media-related activity.
- H. No person under arrest or in the custody of the Department shall be interviewed by the media.
- I. No juvenile is to be photographed by the media while under Department custody or control.
- J. Adults who are in Department custody pursuant to a lawful arrest may be photographed by media members, in such a manner, place, and time as prescribed by the Chief of Police, a Division Commander, or the PIO. The media refers to this process as a "walk by."
- K. Photographs of persons arrested by the Department may be released to the media, in the interest of public safety in accordance with applicable state law.

VII. Fire and Rescue Public Information Officer

- A. The Fire and Rescue Department's PIO will work closely with the Police Department's PIO or on-scene supervisor during an incident involving responses from multiple public safety agencies. However, as a general rule, the Fire and Rescue PIO will handle the media and press releases for the following types of incidents:
 1. Fires and Incendiary Devices
 2. Hazardous Materials
 3. Rescue Operations (e.g. building collapse, natural disaster, etc.)

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4. Other incidents in which the Fire and Rescue Department maintains primary responsibility for the mitigation or investigation of the incident.
5. Emergency Medical Incidents.

Attachments:

Index as: Public Information.
 Public Information Officer
 Media Policies
 Media Relations
 Media Release Form
 Bilingual Officer

References: Virginia Code Sections: [16.1-301](#), and [16.1-309.1](#)