



**MULTNOMAH COUNTY
SHERIFF'S OFFICE**
Sheriff Nicole Morrissey O'Donnell

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1200.00 – Communication with the Media

Refer:

- [MCSO Agency Policy 715.00 Incident Command System \(ICS\)](#)
- [MCSO Agency Policy 1225.00 MCSO Booking Photos; Usage](#)
- **NWAA 1.9.1**

Definitions:

- **Media** – Any person who is an employee, agent, or independent contractor of any newspaper, magazine, or other periodical, book publisher, news agency, wire service, radio or television station or network, cable or satellite station or network, or audio or audiovisual production company, or any entity that is in the regular business of news gathering and disseminating news or information to the public by any means, including, but not limited to, print, broadcast, photographic, mechanical, internet, or electronic distribution.
- **Media Staging Location** – An area that is set up as a safe location for media, near or at the scene of an incident, to facilitate the enhanced flow of information between the designated Public Information Officer and the media.
- **On-Duty PIO** – The member responsible for acting or designated as the Public Information Officer.
- **Public Information Officer (PIO)** – A Multnomah County Sheriff's Office member responsible for interfacing with the public and media and/or with other agencies according to incident-related information requirements. The PIO develops accurate and complete information on an incident's cause, size, and current situation; resources committed; and other matters of general interest for both internal and external consumption.

Policy:

1. ***The Multnomah County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) strives to provide accurate and timely information that benefits the public interest, while preserving safety and other lawful considerations.***

Procedure:

1. ***Role of the Communications Unit and Public Information Officer:***
 - 1.1. The Communications Unit is responsible for managing agency communication strategies, including public information.

- 1.2. The PIO reports to the Communications Unit. The PIO must be aware of MCSO activities that fall under the realm of news and keep the Communications Manager informed of media interests.
- 1.3. The PIO will reasonably cooperate with the media in an accurate, timely and detailed manner, consistent with the law, as well as public safety and administrative considerations.
 - 1.3.1. The PIO shall not comment on pending litigation.**
 - 1.3.2. The Communications Unit Manager or designee may consult with the Office of the County Attorney as necessary and, unless otherwise authorized by the Sheriff, will decline to comment on pending litigation when requested to do so by members of the news media.**
2. Notification of the on-duty Public Information Officer (PIO):
 - 2.1. The PIO is available to respond to any event which causes public alarm, creates substantial public interest, response by the media or when members request support with media relations. The PIO should be contacted by telephone for urgent responses and by email for all non-urgent notifications.
 - 2.2. If a PIO is not available, a supervisor or incident commander may designate a member as a PIO for the duration of the incident.
 - 2.3. Incidents that require PIO notification include, but are not limited to:
 - 2.3.1. Corrections:
 - 2.3.1.1. Death in custody,
 - 2.3.1.2. Riot or disturbance in a facility,
 - 2.3.1.3. Discharge of a firearm in the line of duty,
 - 2.3.1.4. Anytime a significant event or court matter may bring media attention that requires an agency response from the PIO, or
 - 2.3.1.5. Media requests to access MCSO facilities.
 - 2.3.2. Law Enforcement:
 - 2.3.2.1. All homicides, shootings and major crimes,
 - 2.3.2.2. Serious or fatal collisions and road closures,
 - 2.3.2.3. Natural disaster (e.g., landslides, flooding, wildfires, etc.),
 - 2.3.2.4. Incidents that cause significant public alarm or public disorder at large-scale events and/or in public spaces,

- 2.3.2.5. Discharge of firearm in the line of duty, except when discharged for the purpose of euthanizing an injured animal,
 - 2.3.2.6. Serious hate/bias crimes,
 - 2.3.2.7. Activation of specialty units on MCSO missions (e.g., Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT), Crisis Negotiations Team (CNT), Search and Rescue (SAR), Rapid Response Team (RRT), Vehicular Crimes Team (VCT), etc.), or
 - 2.3.2.8. Arrest of high-profile persons (e.g., MCSO member, member of another public safety agency, elected official or their staff, etc.).
 - 2.3.3. Other:
 - 2.3.3.1. Serious injury or death of a member, or
 - 2.3.3.2. Serious damage to MCSO or County property.
 - 2.3.4. Upon notification, the PIO will notify the Sheriff, Division Chiefs, and/or command members, as appropriate.
- 3. Directing Media Access on Scene:
 - 3.1. The Public Information Officer (PIO) will generally be the source of information about the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) to the media.
 - 3.2. In the absence of the PIO, member(s) in charge of an incident, or their designee(s), may manage media access on scene and release information to the media in accordance with this policy and procedure.
 - 3.3. Media access on scene should be:
 - 3.3.1. Directed to a safe location (known as a media staging location).
 - 3.3.1.1. The media staging location may be shared via email, press release or social media. Deputies on scene may also direct media to the staging location.
 - 3.3.2. Denied or limited when media presence would unreasonably obstruct or interfere with the safety of any person, the carrying out of official duties, or an investigation (e.g., gathering evidence, interviewing victims/witnesses, etc.), until the member(s) in charge, or their designee(s), give permission.
 - 3.3.2.1. Members of the media do not have the right to enter private property without the consent of the property owner.
 - 3.3.2.2. In hazardous areas, members of the media may enter at their own risk, after a reasonable level of order or control

has been established and with the approval of the member(s) in charge or their designee(s).

- 3.4. MCSO members will not prevent members of the media from broadcasting, taking pictures or taking video if they have the lawful right to be at the location. Members may ask the media not to broadcast (from ground or airspace), live during an active tactical incident in accordance with the 1998 live streaming agreement between law enforcement and Portland media members.
- 3.5. Incident commanders, or their designee(s), will ensure accurate information is released as soon as feasible, regardless of media deadlines, to the PIO. Whenever possible, the PIO will release information in a fair and impartial manner.

4. *Releasing Information to the Media or Public:*

- 4.1. It is the responsibility of all Sheriff's Office members to notify the PIO when they receive requests from the media to comment on a subject or incident.
 - 4.1.1. For public safety incidents, the members managing the incident will coordinate with the PIO. When a PIO is not available, a supervisor or incident commander shall contact the Communications Manager or designate a member as a PIO for the duration of the event.
- 4.2. Any member asked to release information to the media shall notify the PIO about the nature of the request. The member shall direct the media to the PIO, or incident designee, for official information.
- 4.3. Members contacted by the media requesting official records, including booking photos, shall be directed to the Communications Unit. All official public records requests must be made in writing and reviewed in accordance with applicable public records law.
- 4.4. Members are encouraged to contact the PIO to prepare communications of agency interest intended for public release (e.g., public alerts, missing person, seeking the identity of a suspect in a criminal case, shelter in place and/or evacuation orders, road closures). Unless given permission by a Communications Unit member, the distribution of agency communications is the responsibility of the Communications Unit.

History:

- Originating Policy/Procedure: 11/9/17
- Next Review Date: 11/9/19
- Review By: Communications Unit
- Reviewed: 09/21/2023 (Comprehensive Review)

- Next Review: 09/21/2025 (Internal Review)
- Review By: Communications Unit
- ***Reviewed: 04/28/2025 (Internal Review)***
- ***Next Review: 04/28/2027 (Comprehensive Stakeholder Review)***
- ***Review By: Communications Unit***