OPERATIONAL MANUAL

OPS-520 – MEDIA RELATIONS & PUBLIC INFORMATION

Amends/Supersedes: OPS-520 (10/17/2017) **Date of Issue:** 08/10/2026

I. GENERAL

A. All members of this department will strive to maintain a relationship of professionalism, trust, cooperation, mutual respect, ethical treatment, and a free flow of information with the public and news media without partiality.

B. Employees of the department who believe they have been treated unethically by members of the media should contact the department's Public Information Office (PIO).

NOTE: A copy of media code of ethics is on file within the PIO's office

II. PROCEDURE

A. Public Information Office

1. The PIO communications manager serves as the primary public information officer for the Newport News Police Department. A member of the PIO will be available 24 hours a day to handle the liaison duties between the media and the department. Regular working hours before the PIO are 0800 to 1700 hours. After regular hours, weekends, or holidays, the on call PIO may be contacted by the media directly or contact the Communications Division to identify the on call PIO. [54.1.1(a)]

NOTE: If the PIO is unable to be contacted, the highest ranking supervisor assigned to the division handling the situation shall be notified. This person shall assume the responsibility of releasing the information or shall designate the person who will disseminate this information. The PIO shall be notified as soon as possible and forwarded the content of the information that was released.

2. Any major incident likely to attract news media attention shall be brought to the attention of the PIO. [41.2.5(f)]

3. The PIO shall be notified on the following: [46.1.2; 54.1.1(a)]

a. Police shootings.

b. Tactical situations (e.g. hostage, barricade situations). [46.1.4(k)]

c. Serious accidents involving police vehicles, or any serious injury to Department personnel.

d. Homicides, accidental deaths, suicides or malicious wounding with serious injury.

e. Vehicle accidents involving fatalities, or serious injury or major property damage that may prompt an inquiry by the media.

f. Incidents involving people whom, by their position in society, are of interest to the public (e.g. politicians, celebrities, community leaders).

g. Missing people, when an intensive search has begun, or when there are indications that a crime has been committed (e.g. Amber, Silver or Codi Alerts). [41.2.5(f); 41.2.6(c)]

h. Natural or man-made disasters resulting in loss of life and/or extensive property damage.

i. Demonstrations, strikes or civil disorders, regardless of damage. [46.1.3(f)]

j. Bank robberies, kidnapping or verified abduction.

k. Incidents that generate increased media inquiries.

4. The PIO shall also be notified of any incident or event that the watch commander deems necessary, or upon the arrival of news media to an incident. [41.2.5; 41.2.6(d)]
5. Department personnel are responsible for ensuring that the PIO is advised of all interesting or newsworthy events occurring within their purview.

   NOTE: Any time a department employee is questioned or interviewed by the media, they should attempt to notify the PIO before the interview. If the PIO cannot be reached, the employee will notify their commander, who may authorize them to speak to the media, handle the interview themselves, or decline the interview. If an interview is conducted, the written notification of what was covered in the interview will be sent to the PIO immediately, so they can prepare for follow up inquiries.
6. The PIO shall be responsible for the arrangements and coordination of any media conferences as requested by the Chief of Police, or his designee. [54.1.1(d)]

B. Release of Information to Media by Police Personnel [54.1.1(c,e)]

1. The release of information on incidents involving other city, state or federal agencies will be conducted by the agency having primary jurisdiction. [54.1.1(f)]
2. The PIO is responsible for preparing and distributing agency news releases to include breaking and routine news information during normal business hours. If media representatives contact the Communications Division regarding breaking news issues, they may be given basic information (type of case reported and location block) by an available Communications supervisor and referred to the on call PIO. [54.1.1(b)]
3. Routine Media Inquiries
   a. For daily news inquiries, media representatives should contact the PIO during normal working hours.
   b. All day-to-day requests for information, interviews of department personnel (including the Chief of Police) shall be scheduled through the PIO during normal working hours.
4. During incidents, the media may have access to the following information: [54.1.1(d)]
   a. Known facts and circumstances relating to the crime that will not hinder or prejudice the investigation (e.g., the time and place of arrest).
   b. A description of the suspects, if known. A suspect may not be identified by name until he has been formally charged with the commission of a crime, or a warrant has been served.
   c. The nature, substance or text of the charges brought against the suspect, including a brief description of the offense.
   d. The identity of the investigating and/or arresting officer provided such information does not jeopardize or compromise personnel assigned to undercover operations.
   e. The limited release of victim(s) name and residence city. Consideration of the victim's safety and the integrity of the investigation on prosecution of a case will be prioritized. If releasing the name of the victim may present safety or security issues, their names will not be released. Typically, the department only releases the names of deceased victims and missing persons. The department will not release the names of any victims of sexual offenses or juveniles unless the names are publicly available in court filings, or the department has received written consent from the victim/guardian.
   f. The identity of a deceased victim after the family has been notified.
      1) Supervisors who want to restrict the release of victim information must notify the PIO.
      2) The identity of any juvenile whose death results from any crime (in accordance with § 19.2-11.2 Code of Virginia) will not be released unless written consent has been provided by the next of kin.

5. The media shall not have access to the following information:
   a. Any information that could hinder or prejudice the investigation.
   b. Prior criminal history (record).
   c. The character or reputation of the accused. (If the accused has not been apprehended, an officer associated with the investigation may release any information necessary to aid in the apprehension of the accused or to advise the public of a potential danger.)
   d. The existence or contents of any confession, admission, or statement given by the accused, or information about the presence or absence of any examination or tests conducted during an investigation. [1.2.3(a,b)]
   e. Personal opinions about the suspect, his guilt or innocence, mental status, anticipated plea, or value of evidence against the accused.
   f. The identity, testimony or credibility of confidential witnesses. [1.2.3(a,b)]
   g. Suspects who are interviewed but not charged shall not be identified.
   h. Name, address, and location of any victims of sexual offenses.
   i. Name and address of juveniles arrested as provided by law.
   j. Home address or telephone number of any Newport News Police Department employee.
   k. The contents of a suicide note or electronically recorded message.
   l. The amount of money taken in any robbery except for a general description, i.e., undisclosed amount.
   m. Specific cause of death until announced by the State Medical Examiner or their deputy.
6. Crime Scenes [54.1.1(a); 54.1.3]
   a. Media representatives may be given guided access to crime scenes when it is determined practical by the ranking investigating officer, except in the following instances:
      1) When the crime scene is on private property and the owner of the property clearly requests that news media representatives not be given access.
      2) When the presence of news media representatives might adversely affect the preservation of evidence at the scene or interfere with the investigation.
   b. Crime scenes will be secured by department personnel and media access will not be permitted within the secured area. News media coverage will be permitted adjacent to any barriers. Major scenes may require a media staging area, at which time the on call PIO will be notified..
   c. A news person may be permitted around a crime scene or a serious police incident, but they do not have the authority to be within a crime scene or area which has been secured to preserve evidence or at any location where their presence jeopardizes police operations.
   d. News media representatives will be provided with preliminary information about the crime at crime scenes either by the PIO or the ranking investigative officer (or designee). In the event neither is available, the officers responding to the original call, to include officers working traffic accidents, may provide verified information. Department members providing such information will release information as set forth in Section II. B. 3 of this policy. The officer shall notify the PIO as soon as possible as to the content of any information that was released.
7. Interviews and Photographs [54.1.1(a); 54.1.3]
   a. Photographs or video may be taken from any area where the news media representatives have been given access. Officers may restrict the use of flash, strobe or high intensity lights when the use of such equipment would hinder a police operation, endanger officers or citizens by exposing them to unnecessary risks, or creating a hazard (e.g., may cause an explosion in a gaseous atmosphere).

b. Members of the Department will not prevent the photographing of defendants when they are in public places outside the courtroom. They will neither encourage nor discourage pictures and must not pose with the accused.

c. Booking photos will be released, through the PIO. Other department photographs of a suspect may be released provided the photograph will not jeopardize an investigation. It is proper to disclose this type of information to enlist public assistance in apprehending fugitives from justice. Such disclosures may include photographs as well as other information if not prohibited by policy or law.

d. Areas of access for news media representatives within the confines of Newport News Police Department facilities will include:

1) Any areas open to the public.

2) Any designated area set aside for news media briefings.

3) Any area to which the news media representatives are provided guided access by a member of this Department.

NOTE: No photographing of suspects or witnesses will be permitted in any working areas of the Department.

e. News media representatives shall be permitted to interview victims of crime or disasters, who have consented to such interviews provided:

1) The victim is not undergoing medical attention.

2) If victims desire not to be interviewed, the news media representative will be so advised.

8. Releasing Sensitive Information [54.1.1(e)]

a. Items of evidence should not be made public, which, if disclosed, would be prejudicial to the solution of the case. Photographs may be furnished of a person accused by indictment or warrant. Where the identity of a suspect has not been established, it may be desirable to publicize descriptions, artists' sketches, or other information that could lead to the identification and arrest of the suspect.

b. Suspects who are interviewed, but not charged, should not be identified.

c. The finding of physical evidence, such as weapons or proceeds of the crime, the issuance and service of a search warrant, and the positive or negative results of the search, may be released provided the search was not carried out under authority of a federal search warrant which has, or may be, subject to a federal gag order or is prejudicial. Information as to how a weapon or evidence of the crime was located should be withheld if this involved information that is prejudicial or confidential.

d. Fugitive cases may require wide publicity. Records of conviction should not be publicized. The circumstances and facts in each case will be the controlling factors in decisions. In some fugitive cases it may be necessary to withhold information when its publication would be detrimental to the apprehension of the wanted person. Common sense should dictate the manner in which fugitive cases are handled with a positive view toward the public interest and safety and protection of other law enforcement agencies.

e. References to cases being tried in court will be directed to the Commonwealth's Attorney. Members of the police department, including the PIO, will not comment on any case being tried. The only exception to this shall be by or at the direction of the Chief of Police.

9. Guidelines for news media representatives arriving on the scene. [54.1.1(a,b,c,d); 54.1.3]

a. News media representatives shall have the proper identification (credentials) before being allowed access. If the news media representative does not have the proper identification, access may be permitted by the officer in charge or the PIO.

b. When mobile television or radio transmitting units arrive at the scene, operators shall be directed to go on foot to the PIO to receive assistance in determining the most strategic location to place the vehicles. Department personnel will help advance such mobile units to that location.

c. Situation briefings may be provided on scene. The PIO or the highest-ranking officer in charge will conduct these briefings. [54.1.1(d)]

d. Requests for information regarding any investigation that are not be provided at the scene should be directed to the PIO for follow-up.

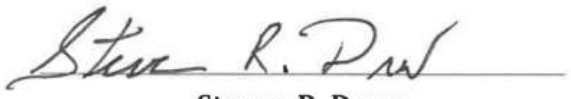
10. Requesting withholding of publication.

News/Media personnel may photograph or report anything they observe when legally present at an emergency scene. Where publication of such coverage would interfere with an official investigation or place a victim, suspect or others in jeopardy, the withholding of publication is dependent upon a cooperative press, not upon censorship by the Department. Upon such circumstances, officers should advise the PIO of the possible consequences of publication; however, officers may not interfere with the media's activities as long as that performance remains within the confines of the law.

C. Department personnel are encouraged to notify the PIO of events or actions taken by department personnel or civilians that may provide an opportunity for a positive human interest news story. In these types of incidents timeliness is most important.

D. Media input into Public Information Policies [54.1.2]

This policy is made available to the media on the department's website and upon request. Unsolicited feedback regarding this policy will be reviewed by the PIO. Periodically, the PIO may solicit policy feedback from the media when developing public information policies and procedures.



Steven R. Drew
Chief of Police