

**PREAMBLE:**

A professional working relationship between the police and news media representatives is essential so that both may accomplish their objectives. News media representatives will be permitted to pursue their activities within the confines of the law and without interference from OPD employees as long as these activities do not unduly interfere with departmental operation or infringe upon individual rights. Information will be released to the news media without partiality.

**POLICY:**

It is the policy of the Omaha Police Department (OPD) to release relevant information to the public through various news media while respecting victims, protecting the rights of individuals in police custody, and preventing the disclosure of confidential police information. OPD employees shall adhere to all procedures in the OPD "[Records – Information Dissemination](#)" policy when releasing information to the media.

**DEFINITIONS:**

Public Information: Information that may be of interest to the general public regarding policy, procedures or events involving the department, or other newsworthy information that is not legally protected, does not unduly interfere with the mission of the department, infringe upon the rights of any person or compromise the legitimate safety and privacy interest of department employees, victims, witnesses or others.

News Media Representatives: Those individuals who are directly employed by agencies of the electronic broadcast or print media. Free-lance workers in this field are to be regarded as members of the general public unless otherwise authorized by the Chief of Police.

Public Information Office (PIO): The OPD's PIO serves as a central source of information for release by the department and responds to requests for information by the news media and members of the community. The PIO is directly responsible to the Chief of Police.

**PROCEDURE:**

**I. Public Information Office (PIO)**

- A. The Public Information Office (PIO) will be responsible for:
  - 1. On-call responses to the news media as detailed in this policy.
    - a. PIO officers may be contacted by telephone or email (See [Appendix A](#) for PIO contact information).
  - 2. Preparing and distributing news releases.
    - a. The PIO may coordinate this responsibility with other units who have need to notify media of events (i.e., Traffic Unit, CIB, etc.).
  - 3. Coordinating all news conferences.
  - 4. Assisting units in disseminating information to the media regarding investigations.
  - 5. Assisting in crisis situations within the department as assigned by the Chief of Police.

B. The PIO will be notified of and respond to the following scenes to provide information to the media:

1. Serious injury (hospitalization) to an officer or civilian resulting from a police action.
2. Officer-involved incidents.
3. Barricaded person, hostage, or other ERU call-out situation.
4. Incident serious enough for an officer to be relieved of duty.
5. Major disturbances or disasters.
6. Pursuit resulting in serious injuries (hospitalization) or significant property damage.
7. Multiple deaths.
8. Death on city property.
9. Incidents with multi-law enforcement agency response.
10. Homicides when feasible.
11. High profile incidents that may garner significant media attention.
12. Any incident in which the PIO is requested by the on-scene command officer (i.e., incidents involving a high-profile arrest, significant media attention, etc.).

**NOTE:** Notifying the PIO of such incidents will allow the PIO to prepare for future media questions.

## II. Release of Information to the Media by On-Scene Command Officers

A. Officers will adhere to the following procedures when releasing information to the media in the absence of the PIO:

1. Officers' primary responsibility when responding to the scene of a crime incident is to preserve the integrity of the scene, to gather evidence, and to complete other needed investigative activities.
2. In order to make certain that information released to the news media is accurate-and that officers are able to fulfill their responsibilities at the scene, the command officer in charge of the incident or their designee will be responsible for releasing the following information regarding the incident to the news media in a timely manner when the PIO is not present:
  - a. Offense committed.
  - b. Time of the incident.
  - c. Location of the incident.
3. Officers will not release suspect or victim information on-scene to the media unless directed to do so by the PIO or the appropriate investigative unit.

- a. The media may be directed to obtain more detailed information regarding the incident by contacting the PIO or by obtaining OPD reports.

**NOTE:** OPD reports shall be released in accordance with the OPD "[Records – Information Dissemination](#)" policy.

4. The command officer or their designee may contact the PIO for advisement if needed or may request that the PIO come on-scene and brief the news media when needed (see section I, B above).
5. Media representatives who have follow-up questions or questions regarding minor incidents that cannot be answered by the on-scene command officer will contact the PIO as follows:
  - a. Media representatives will be instructed to contact PIO during "B" shift or by contacting the on-call PIO officer.
  - b. Media representatives shall NOT be instructed to contact PIO employees during "A" shift regarding minor incidents. If guidance is needed during "A" shift, the command officer or their designee may contact an on-duty PIO employee for assistance.

### **III. Special Circumstances**

- A. Incidents Involving Child Victims, Sexual Assault Victims, or a Homicide, or an ERU Call Out.
  1. The on-scene command officer shall coordinate the release of information to the media with the commander of the appropriate investigative unit and/or the PIO.
- B. Officer-Involved Incidents.
  1. Only the Chief of Police or their designee shall authorize information to be released to the media in these incidents.
  2. OPD employees shall adhere to all procedures in the OPD "[Response to Resistance – Investigative Process for Use of Force Incidents Involving Serious Injury or Death](#)" policy.
- C. Multi-Law Enforcement Agency Response.
  1. When the OPD is working in a mutual effort with other law enforcement agencies, a consensus among the participating agencies will determine the content and method of releasing information by the most appropriate agency. The PIO will be responsible for coordinating the effort.
- D. Fire Scenes.
  1. All news releases regarding multiple alarm fires, deaths due to fire, arson investigations, or hazardous material incidents will be handled by the Chief of the Omaha Fire Department or their designee.
  2. The OPD Homicide Unit will be responsible for releasing information on deaths due to arson.

### **IV. Media Interviews**

A. Except in the case of on-scene interviews conducted by the on-scene command officer or designee (see Section II above), any member of the OPD who is contacted by the media for interviews or information will refer the media representative to the PIO and notify both the PIO and their supervisor of the request.

1. There will be no interviews given to the media regarding policies, procedures, or events involving the department by an employee of the OPD without prior approval from the Office of the Chief of Police.

B. On-Scene Interviews

1. Prior to conducting an on-camera interview, officers will prepare the media off-camera to make certain that the media clearly understands the incident.

**NOTE:** Preparing the media off-camera will allow the media to ask questions prior to the interview and allow the officer to better formulate an appropriate response.

2. Officers will be aware that some reporters may be carrying the interview live via their cellular phone or other device. Officers will ask reporters if anyone will be carrying the interview live so that the officer may prepare accordingly.

V. Media Access to Crime Scenes

A. Media representatives will be allowed anywhere that the general public is allowed.

1. Any citizen or news media representative has the right to photograph or videotape police officers performing their official duties. Officers shall adhere to the OPD "[Recording of Officer Activity by the Public](#)" policy when being recorded by the public or news media representatives.
2. The on-scene command officer will be responsible for designating a media staging location on-scene that provides the media with a safe location to film and report on the incident as appropriate.
  - a. Officers are not responsible for censoring the media or ensuring responsible reporting practices. However, officers are responsible for scene security and may shield a scene or evidence from the view of the public or media when appropriate.

**EXAMPLE:** If officers are at the scene of a traffic crash and the motorist is being extracted the media is allowed to obtain footage if they are able to do so from an area that the general public is allowed. However, officers may use shields to prevent the public and/or media from viewing the extraction.

B. Media representatives will identify themselves using station identification. Media representatives are only required to provide an OPD-issued identification card when they access police reports at OPD Headquarters.

C. The command officer in charge of the scene may allow the media into the exterior perimeter of a scene when appropriate.

D. Media will be expected to adhere to all traffic/parking laws around the crime scene and will not block emergency vehicles from accessing the scene.

**NOTE:** Per NRS §60-6,144, the media shall not stop on the interstate to gain access to a crash/scene.

- E. If a crime scene is on private property and the owner/agent or person in control of the property denies members of the news media permission to enter onto the property in the presence of police, officers will make certain that the media does not enter onto the property (see the OPD ["Trespassing"](#) policy for further details).
- F. Fire Scenes
  - 1. The decision to allow properly identified reporters and photographers to pass beyond fire lines or to restrict them from a fire area will be the responsibility of the on-scene Fire Commander.
  - 2. Officers will not stop news media from approaching the fire command car unless specifically told to do so by the fire commander.

## **VI. Media Access to Persons in Police Custody**

- A. Persons involved in incidents who are in police custody shall not be allowed to discuss the incident with news media representatives.
- B. Individuals in custody will not be posed for the news media to photograph.
  - 1. Department photographs of an arrested person, when taken according to booking procedure, may be released provided it will not jeopardize an investigation.
  - 2. The media may take photographs of the suspect at the scene if the suspect is in plain view of the media.
    - a. Officers do not need to take extraordinary measures to shield the suspect at the scene unless photographing the suspect will jeopardize the investigation.
    - b. If the media is photographing the suspect at the scene in plain view and the suspect is a juvenile, officers will notify the photographer that the suspect is a juvenile as a courtesy.

## **VII. Media Relations**

- A. On-scene media may be a good source of investigative information. Investigative officers who arrive on-scene are encouraged to greet the media and build rapport as they may have information useful to the investigation.
- B. Generally, the media will only provide footage that was aired and will rarely provide raw footage of a scene. Officers that need a copy of the video for legitimate investigative purposes will contact the PIO to coordinate getting the footage from the news outlet.
- C. OPD employees will notify the PIO if they have had any conflict and/or confrontation with media representatives in the course of their duty.
  - 1. The PIO will follow-up on the incident and mediate it as appropriate.
- D. Officers shall notify the PIO and the Chief of Police or their designee as soon as possible when a media representative has been arrested.

## **VIII. Ride-Along Requests**

- A. News media representatives may request a ride-along through the PIO.

1. All requests shall outline the focus of the story and be approved by the Office of the Chief of Police.
2. Reporters/photographers will follow the same guidelines as the general public when going on a ride-along.

**REFERENCES:**

**I. Previous OPD Orders**

- A. Previous General Orders: #128-75, 3-91, 29-93, 61-94, 18-00, 6-07, and 91-17.

**II. Accreditation Standards**

- A. Relevant CALEA Accreditation Standards include: 41.2.4, 54.1.1, 54.1.2, and 54.1.3.

**III. Other**

- A. PPM Monthly Updates: #4-2021 and 2-2023.