

Pasco Police Department Policy Manual

PUBLIC INFORMATION	Chapter No. 54
Effective Date: 04/01/2018	Reference: Social Media Procedure Manual
Revised: 10/21/2021	

54.1.1 PUBLIC INFORMATION ACTIVITIES

All department personnel have the responsibility to be responsive to the media and public interest in department operations and situations by:

- Helping media personnel in covering both routine news stories and at scene of incidents.
- Preparing and distributing news releases.
- Arranging for and/or assisting at news conferences.

Media requests for routine information or assistance will generally be routed to the Public Information Officer (PIO). The PIO will be prepared to assist in a uniformed or non-uniformed capacity by:

- Helping during a crisis as a liaison between the media, public, and department.
- Having someone available to respond to the news media.
- Monitoring department news stories publicized by the media
- Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about persons according to appropriate statutes as related to [RCW 10.97.050](#).
- Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential department investigations and operations.
- Whenever the Pasco Police Department is involved with another agency, any information released to the news media will be coordinated and approved with the agency involved.

Department Personnel Authorized to Release Information to the Media

One person will handle the public information function at major incident scenes or newsworthy events so that all other duty personnel can concentrate on the police task at hand. That person can include:

- Chief of Police
- Public Information Officer (PIO). The PIO, if available, will respond to major incident scenes or newsworthy events. The PIO is the preferred person to perform this function at major incidents.
- Patrol or Detective Sergeant
- Designated person

Information about ongoing investigations:

- The investigator or detective or their supervisors may release information as appropriate.
- The PIO assists as requested.

News Release Policy

The department normally issues news releases for unusual occurrences or in response to media inquiries. A “news release” is a formal statement from the department concerning a specific event. These releases should not be confused with the routine distribution of news.

A commissioned supervisor will approve all news releases prior to distribution. After the release has been approved, the PIO, or other authorized staff in the absence of the PIO, may release the following information:

1. Age, sex, marital status, area of residence (i.e., Pasco, Franklin County), and occupation of an individual arrested but not yet formally charged.
2. Alleged offense.
3. Circumstances immediately surrounding the arrest, including the time and place of arrest, vehicle pursuit, possession of weapons, and injuries.
4. Information about a juvenile (i.e., age, sex, marital status, area of residence) **ONLY** when that information could not reasonably be expected to identify the juvenile or the juvenile’s family.
5. Information about an individual arrested and formally charged with a crime including:
 - Charges filed
 - Amount of bail
 - Defendant’s name, age, sex, residence, marital status, and occupation
 - Information revealing the amount of loss resulting from a criminal act
6. Any formal News Releases to the media will be provided to the PIO.

The following information **WILL NOT** be released:

- Opinions about the defendant’s character, reputation, guilt, or innocence.
- Information about the existence of any admissions, confessions, or the contents of any statement made by any suspect or the failure or refusal of any suspect to make a statement, cooperate, or submit to any tests or examination.
- Any reference to or about the results of an investigative procedure, such as fingerprints, polygraph examinations, ballistics, or laboratory tests, etc.
- The identity, credibility, or anticipated testimony of prospective witnesses.
- Opinions that might tend to cause unwarranted public alarm.
- The home address or home telephone number of any department employee without that employee’s express consent.
- Information revealing the identity of persons who file complaints with the department if their lives, physical safety, or property would be endangered, or if they request nondisclosure.
- Information relating to internal personnel files, complaints against employees, or investigations will not be released without prior approval from the Chief of Police or designee. When possible, provide media representatives with an explanation if they are denied access to certain information.

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Internal distribution of all news releases:

- Chief of Police
- Deputy Chief
- Captains
- Public Information Officer
- City of Pasco Communications

In the case of multi-jurisdictional involvement in an incident (police, fire, coroner, etc.), the public information officer contacts all of the agencies. A coordinated plan may then be developed for the release of information to the media. (Standard 54.1.1.f.)

54.1.3 MEDIA ACCESS

The PIO, Patrol or Detective Sergeant, Chief of Police, or their designee is responsible for coordinating the media at a crime scene or event under the department's control.

Media personnel are to be denied access to areas:

- If the owner of private property requests they be excluded.
- If there is a possibility of evidence being damaged, tampered with, or removed from a crime scene.
- If the investigation may be hampered.
- If their presence will disrupt tactical operations
- If media presence can place a citizen or police officer at risk of injury or death.

Once an inner crime scene perimeter is established, an assembly area for the news will be established. Persons with valid news media identification will be allowed to enter this area. News media vehicles may enter the news assembly area only if it does not interfere with police investigations or operations.

Officers shall try to warn media personnel of any dangers in a particular area. The City of Pasco is not held liable for the safety of news members who enter restricted areas. Police officers may warn members of the news who refuse to stay in a particular area or enter restricted areas that they may be subject to arrest for interfering with police investigations.

The Incident Commander (IC) or designee calls both the Police and Fire Department PIOs to handle media inquiries at major fires, natural disasters, or catastrophic events. The PIOs will report directly to the IC at the scene. The PIO conducts media briefings as authorized by the IC.

54.1.4 PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER TRAINING

The person(s) designated as PIO and/or designated PIO(s) shall receive training for the position of PIO.

54.1.5 SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Pasco Police Department endorses the secure use of social media to enhance communication, collaboration and information exchange, streamline processes, and foster productivity. Social

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media provides a new and potentially valuable means of assisting the department and its personnel in meeting community outreach, problem-solving, investigative, crime prevention, and related objectives.

- Social media content shall adhere to applicable laws, regulations, and policies including all information technology and records management policies.
- Pages will clearly indicate that any content posted or submitted for posting is subject to public disclosure.
- Department personnel approved to post on social media platforms will conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the department and, accordingly, shall adhere to all department standards of conduct and observe conventionally accepted protocols and proper decorum.

This policy is not meant to address one form of social media rather social media in general, as advances in technology will occur and new tools will emerge.

Please refer to the Social Media Procedures Manual for additional details.