


STRATFORD POLICE DEPARTMENT 	Type of Directive: Policy and Procedure	Updated: 03-07-2024
	Title: Media Relations	No. 10.2
	Issuing Authority: Chief Joseph McNeil	Issued: 10-25-2018
	Reference: Tier 1-2, 1.10.3, 2.4.11, 2.5.5 History 10-25-18, 04-25-23	

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for the release and dissemination of agency information to the news media.

POLICY:

It is the policy of the Stratford Police Department that information is released in a factual and professional manner and in a way as not to jeopardize the integrity of an official investigation or infringe upon the rights of the individual.

It will be the policy of the Stratford Police Department to closely observe the right of the community to be informed of the events occurring within the community that are handled by or involve this Department.

It will be the policy of the Stratford Police Department to maintain cooperative relationships with the various media organizations and their personnel, assuring equal access to information that may be released.

It will be the policy of the Stratford Police Department to release only that information which may be disclosed legally and would not interfere with the operations of this Department.

It will be the policy of the Stratford Police Department not to release information that would jeopardize an individual's rights or the prosecution of an individual, or which would tend to impair or impede the law enforcement process.

PROCEDURE:

Public Information Officer (PIO)

The Chief of Police will appoint Public Information Officers to coordinate media releases and dissemination of information. The Public Information Officers (PIO) will act as a liaison between the Department and the mass news media to ensure that information regarding Department matters is properly disseminated.

Public Information Officers are responsible for:

- Assisting members of the news media in covering routine news stories regarding police matters

- Responding to police scenes, which are of public concern, in order to gather pertinent information which will be released to news bureaus in a factual and timely manner
- Maintaining an "on-call" status in order to respond to police scenes which are of significant interest to the public, and to assist police and media personnel in gathering pertinent information for public release
- Preparing written news releases related to police incidents and agency activities that are of public interest, and to distribute those releases to the mass news media; including use of agency social media sites
- Arranging and coordinating department news conferences
- Coordinating and authorizing the release of information regarding victims, witnesses, suspects, arrestees and agency personnel to the news media
- Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential investigations and operations
- Being familiar with all agency activities, functions, operations and programs
- Releasing agency information under the authority and direction of the Chief of Police

Persons Authorized to Release Information

Public Information Officers and police supervisors are authorized to release agency information to the news media under the authority and direction of the Chief of Police and within the guidelines of this policy.

- The PIO may refer specific media inquiries to the appropriate supervisor.
- Shift Commanders may release information to the media whenever the PIO is not available.
- The Detective Bureau Commander or designee should review and approve the release of any information concerning an active investigation, within their respective division, prior to publication.
- When assigned to an active police scene, police personnel shall refer all news media inquiries to the PIO, Shift Commander or Sergeant.
- The Records Lieutenant is authorized to release information from department files based on Freedom of Information guidelines.

Press Releases

A press release may be completed on all police incidents which are of significant interest to the public, the mass news media or when deemed appropriate by the Chief of Police, the Public Information Officer or a Captain.

Whenever possible the media release should be sent out through the PIO.

The subject matter of the press release shall include the time, date, location and nature of an incident. Information regarding the identity of those involved in an incident shall be released within the guidelines set forth in this policy.

The release should be sent to all local news agencies, the Chief and Deputy Chief of Police and the Mayor's Office.

Officer Involved Shootings / In Custody Deaths

The Chief of Police, PIO and the Inspector General's Office will confer to determine what types of information will be released to the media, balancing the integrity of the investigation, the safety of personnel and an effort to maintain transparency.

For all uses of force, where a body-worn camera and/or dashboard camera recording was made, after an officer reviews such footage, if desired, the Stratford Police Department will make such footage available to the public upon request. Such availability must be not later than forty-eight (48) hours following the officers' review of the footage, or if the officer does not review the footage, ninety-six (96) hours after the incident, whichever is earlier.

The Chief of Police will assure that the agency collects, maintains and reports to appropriate Federal agencies data on all officer-involved shootings, whether fatal or non-fatal, as well as any in-custody deaths.

Media Access at Secured Police Scenes

Official police lines are established to:

- Preserve the integrity of an area which is to be analyzed and processed during a criminal investigation
- Secure areas which may pose a threat to public safety and/or involve significant resources on the part of emergency services (e.g., major fires, natural disasters, or other catastrophic events)
- The department extends certain privileges to members of the news media at secured police scenes so they may gather sufficient information regarding incidents of public interest.

A "Media Staging Area" may be established in order to give media personnel a working view of the secured area, as well as convenient access to the PIO, or designee, without violating the integrity of the scene or hindering police operations.

Officers do not have the legal authority to prevent the public or news media representatives from photographing or videotaping police operations or crime scenes from outside official police lines.

The commanding officer of a police scene may take precautions to cover objects within the secure area which may not be appropriate for public view.

Release of Information to News Media

Releasing inaccurate or privileged information to the public and/or media can expose the agency to civil liability as well as compromise criminal investigations.

Unless prohibited, the following information may be released:

- The date, time, location and nature of a reported crime
- The name, sex, age, and address of a person charged with a crime
- sex, age of the victim of a crime
- A photograph of an arrested person when cleared by the case investigator or PIO
- Department personnel may not prevent media representatives from photographing arrestees while in a public area however; arrestees shall not be paraded or posed for the media.

Information which may NOT be released unless cleared through a PIO:

- The identity of any victim of a sexual battery, domestic violence, child abuse or neglect, stalking, aggravated battery or witness tampering or any information, which if divulged, might lead to the victim's identity, residence or place of employment
- The identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to family notification
- Specific causes of death prior to the Medical Examiner's evaluation and the approval of a Criminal Investigations Division Captain
- Any information concerning the substance of a statement given to the police by the accused (e.g. refusal of statement, confession or admission)
- The identity of a juvenile charged with a misdemeanor who has not been adjudicated as an adult; or a juvenile's criminal history
- Unauthorized release of information which is of an evidentiary nature regarding a criminal case
- Contents of a suicide note prior to case closure
- Personal opinions, such as, opinions regarding the guilt or innocence of the accused or merits of the case
- Information concerning the identity, testimony, or credibility of a prospective witness
- Information received from, or actions taken by, other law enforcement agencies without their concurrence for the release
- The home addresses, telephone numbers, social security numbers and, photographs of active or former agency personnel or their family members; nor their family member's places of employment
- Unauthorized comments concerning prior criminal record, character or reputation of an accused

- Reports, transcripts or summaries of proceedings from which the media and public were excluded by judicial order
- Information concerning the identity of a juvenile offender (name, photographs, and address) may be released if the child is arrested under an offense which, if committed by an adult, would be a felony; or if the child arrested has been found by a court to have committed three or more offenses which, if committed by an adult, would be misdemeanors.

Release of Information Involving Other Agencies

When an investigation involves another law enforcement agency the agency having primary jurisdiction and responsibility shall coordinate the release of information.

The federal agency controlling a narcotic investigation shall determine the guidelines for the release of information.

Whenever the police department and fire department have shared responsibility of an incident scene, the Police PIO and Fire PIO will coordinate their efforts to ensure that information is appropriately released.

Whenever city administration and the police department have shared responsibility regarding incidents or situations involving city employees, the Police PIO and Mayor's Officer will coordinate information and press release

Media Access to the Department

Representative of accredited news media agencies entering the police department will be allowed access to specific areas of need by the PIO or designated supervisor.

While in secured areas of the department, media personnel will complete their business under proper supervision and will return directly to a public area of the department.

Media photography within secured areas is restricted and must be authorized by the PIO or an agency captain.

Notifications

The Chief of Police and the Public Information Officer shall, in an expeditious manner, be notified whenever:

- Incidents of a sensitive nature which may draw public attention to an agency employee or the Department
- Incidents likely to attract significant ongoing media attention
- Incidents involving serious officer injury
- Incidents involving serious injury to a suspect or citizen due to police action

The commanding supervisor of an incident scene shall determine who will be notified and shall verify that the appropriate notifications were made.