

Media Relations

323.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidelines for media releases and media access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies and other law enforcement activities.

323.2 RESPONSIBILITIES

The ultimate authority and responsibility for the release of information to the media shall remain with the Chief of Police. However, in situations not warranting immediate notice to the Chief of Police and in situations where the Chief of Police has given prior approval, Division Commanders, Shift Supervisors and the designated Public Information Officer (PIO) may prepare and release information to the media in accordance with this policy and the applicable law.

323.2.1 PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER COMMUNITY RELATIONS

The designated PIO is responsible for maintaining a relationship with the local community (e.g., local businesses, service clubs, schools, religious organizations, other government agencies) that is consistent with the goals and objectives of this department. The PIO shall maintain documentation on all public education efforts including classes, informational flyers and other documentation, meetings and press releases.

323.2.2 MEDIA REQUEST

Any media request for information or access to a law enforcement situation shall be referred to the designated Department media representative, or if unavailable, to the first available supervisor. Prior to releasing any information to the media, employees shall consider the following:

- a. At no time shall any employee of this department make any comment or release any official information to the media without prior approval from a supervisor or the designated Department media representative.
- b. In situations involving multiple law enforcement agencies or other criminal justice agencies including, but not limited to, prosecutors and coroners, every reasonable effort should be made to coordinate media releases with the authorized representative of each involved agency prior to the release of any information by this department.
- c. Under no circumstance should any member of this department make any comments to the media regarding any law enforcement incident not involving this department without prior approval of the Chief of Police.

323.3 MEDIA ACCESS

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Authorized members of the media should be provided access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies and other law enforcement activities. Access by the media is subject to the following conditions:

- a. The media representative shall produce valid press credentials that shall be prominently displayed at all times while in areas otherwise closed to the public.
- b. Media representatives may be prevented from interfering with emergency operations and criminal investigations.
 1. Reasonable effort should be made to provide a safe staging area for the media that is near the incident and that will not interfere with emergency or criminal investigation operations. All information released to the media should be coordinated through the PIO or other designated spokesperson.
- c. No member of this department shall be required to submit to media visits or interviews without the consent of the involved employee.
- d. Media interviews with individuals who are in custody shall not be permitted. Exceptions are only permitted with the approval of the Chief of Police and the express written consent of the person in custody.

A tactical operation should be handled in the same manner as a crime scene, except the news media shall be permitted within the outer perimeter of the scene, subject to any restrictions as determined by the supervisor in charge. Department members shall not jeopardize a tactical operation in order to accommodate the news media. All comments to the media shall be coordinated through a supervisor or the PIO.

323.3.1 TEMPORARY FLIGHT RESTRICTIONS

Whenever the presence of media or other aircraft pose a threat to public or officer safety or significantly hamper incident operations, the field supervisor should consider requesting a Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR). All requests for a TFR should be routed through the Shift Supervisor. The TFR request should include specific information regarding the perimeter and altitude necessary for the incident. It should be requested through the appropriate control tower. If the control tower is not known, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) should be contacted (14 CFR 91.137).

323.3.2 PROVIDING ADVANCE INFORMATION

To protect the safety and rights of officers and other persons, advance information about planned actions by law enforcement personnel, such as movement of persons in custody or the execution of an arrest or search warrant, should not be disclosed to the news media nor should media representatives be invited to be present at such actions except with the prior approval of the Chief of Police.

Any exceptions to the above should only be considered for the furtherance of legitimate law enforcement purposes. Prior to approving any exception, the Chief of Police will consider, at minimum, whether the release of information or presence of the media would unreasonably endanger any individual, prejudice the rights of any person or is otherwise prohibited by law.

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323.4 SCOPE OF INFORMATION SUBJECT TO RELEASE

Any requests for copies of reports or additional information shall be referred to the designated media representative, the custodian of records, or if unavailable, to the Shift Supervisor. Such requests will be processed in accordance with policy and state law.

323.4.1 STATE RESTRICTED INFORMATION

It shall be the responsibility of the authorized employee dealing with media requests to ensure that restricted information is not inappropriately released to the media by this department (see the Records Maintenance and Release and the Personnel Records policies). When in doubt, authorized and available legal counsel should be obtained.

323.5 RELEASE OF INFORMATION

The Department may routinely release information to the media without receiving a specific request. This may include media releases regarding critical incidents, information of public concern, updates regarding significant incidents or requests for public assistance in solving crimes or identifying suspects. This information may also be released through the department website or other electronic data sources.

