



COTTAGE CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

GENERAL ORDER

SUBJECT: MEDIA RELATIONS

NEW REVISED RESCINDS

APPROVED: *GM*
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POLICY

One of the first and most fundamental considerations of the nation's founders in drafting the Bill of Rights was to provide for a free press as an essential element of the First Amendment to the Constitution. They realized that a well-informed citizenry is vital to the effective functioning of a democracy. Police operations profoundly affect the public and, therefore, arouse substantial public interest. The police should make every reasonable effort to serve the needs of the media in informing the public about crimes or other police problems. This should be done with an attitude of openness and frankness whenever possible. The media should have access at the lowest level in a department to personnel who are fully informed about the subject of a press inquiry. Further, they should be told whatever that will not impinge on a person's right to a fair trial, impede a criminal investigation, imperil human life, or seriously endanger the security of the public.

In all other matters dealing with the media on current news, every member of the department should make every reasonable effort consistent with accomplishing the police task in providing the media representatives with full and accurate material.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this directive is to provide guidelines as to types of information which may be released to media representatives, to specify some types of which may not be released, to identify who may release information, and to establish procedures for media relationships with the department.

PROCEDURES

- A. General:
 - 1. The department is committed to informing the community and the news media of events within the public domain that are handled by or involve the department.
 - 2. The public information function includes:
 - a. Assisting news personnel in covering routine news stories and at the scenes of incidents.
 - b. Responding to news media inquiries, in person or telephonically.
 - c. Preparing and distributing news releases.
 - d. Arranging for news conferences as required or requested.
 - e. Releasing information about victims, witnesses, and suspects as allowed by law provided that the release of the information does not compromise any investigation.
 - f. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential departmental investigations and operations.
 - 3. All employees of the department have individual responsibilities concerning the release of information.
 - 4. The chief of police will function as the primary contact for information dissemination to the community and media.
 - 5. Inquiries concerning departmental policies, procedures, practices or relationships with other criminal justice agencies will be referred to the chief of police. Similarly, the chief of police will coordinate all responses to inquiries or release of information pertaining to departmental involvement with other public agencies (e.g. fire department, medical examiner, State's Attorney).
 - 6. The chief of police shall coordinate responses to inquiries and release of information concerning confidential departmental investigations and operations.
- B. Information that is not releasable.
 - 1. The following information will not be released due to 61 Amendment, statutory or other restrictions.
 - 2. The identity of victims of sex related crimes.
 - 3. The identity of any suspect for whom a warrant or summons has not been issued or an indictment returned.
 - 4. The existence of any criminal record or any information concerning the character or reputation of the accused or remarks that tend to establish the defendant as a professional criminal.
 - 5. The existence or contents of any confession, admission, or statement of the accused.

6. The performance of any examination or test by the accused or the refusal or failure to submit to an examination or test.
7. The identity of any actual or potential witnesses to crimes, other than the victims as mentioned above, or comments on the expected testimony or credibility of any witness.
8. Any opinions as to the innocence or guilt of the accused, the merits of the case, the possibility of any plea or negotiations or the value of any evidence.
9. The identity of any juvenile arrested who has not been certified by the Circuit Court and an adult.
10. The names of deceased persons before the notification of next of kin.
11. Information relating to motor vehicle accident reports specifically prohibited by Maryland Law.
12. Comments which suggest that the defendant has aided in the investigation.
13. Information concerning the planning of raids, the execution of search warrants or other specialized enforcement efforts.

C. Release of information pertaining to juveniles.

1. Criminal Offense - Normally, juvenile's name, address, or other distinctly unique information which would serve to identify a juvenile SHALL NOT be released. The age, sex, place of residence and details of the offense MAY be released. Under certain circumstances, a judge may authorize the release of identity information
2. Traffic violations, except for those listed below which are classified as misdemeanor crimes, any information including name, address, etc., is fully releasable.
3. Accidents in which traffic charges are or may be placed as a result of an accident investigation, juvenile identity information will be withheld.
4. Any traffic offense which is a mandatory court appearance and cannot be prepaid, and therefore classified as a misdemeanor or for which the juvenile has been indicted the juvenile's identity SHALL NOT be released.
5. The identity of juvenile victims of sex crimes SHALL NOT be released.

D. Crime or Incident information release

1. Crime or incident information to be released to the media upon request includes:
2. The type of crime or event and when and where it occurred, to include a brief synopsis of known facts concerning the incident.
3. The identity of the victim(s) or the name of the person who reported the crime. If the victim or complainant requests that his or her name not be used in the media, this request will be given to the media. The media are obligated to honor this request.

4. Information concerning property loss, physical injuries or deaths - provided the next of kin have been notified.
5. Information concerning the type or length of investigation.
6. Information concerning the existence and physical description of suspects may be released.
7. If a warrant has been executed then the name, address and description will be released. If a warrant has been issued but not executed and the officer believes that the public may provide information to assist in locating the person, this information may be released.

E. Release of individual arrest information

After the arrest of a person other than a juvenile, the following may be released upon request to the media:

1. The arrestee's name, age, residence and other factual background information.
2. The nature of the charge upon which the arrest was made.
3. The identity of the investigative agency of the police department and any assisting agencies.
4. The circumstances surrounding the arrest, including the place of arrest and the identity of the arresting officer(s).
5. The custody status, if known.
6. The date(s) of various court hearings.
7. Photographs of the defendant(s) without the police identification data may be furnished if readily available in current files.

F. Names of police officers

The names of police officers providing information to the media may be given to the media and published, unless the officer(s) involved are in an undercover assignment. The addresses and telephone numbers of police personnel will not be released.

G. Media contacts and procedures

1. Normally, media representatives either visit the department in person or call seeking information about newsworthy items. Routinely, they should be referred to the chief of police.
2. As a rule, media representatives will not read the offense report since non-releasable information may be on the report (e.g. suspect information or the names of sex crime victims). Offense reports and accident reports should be carefully checked concerning the involvement of juveniles before releasing information.

3. At the scenes of major fires, natural disasters, or other catastrophic events, or at crime scenes, officers shall establish perimeters and control access. Any such limitations should be clearly explained to media representatives, preferably in meetings before any emergencies arise, by sending editors and commissions' copies of this policy. News media representatives should not interfere with law enforcement operations at the scene of an incident. AS soon as possible, however, media representatives should be assisted in gaining access to the scene when it will not interfere with the law enforcement mission. Officers may deny access for legitimate investigative or safety reasons; additionally, they may not authorize the media to trespass onto private property. The media representative is responsible for obtaining any permission necessary once the Law enforcement mission allows access to the scene on private property.