Public Recording of Law Enforcement Activity

425.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE
This policy provides guidelines for handling situations in which members of the public photograph or audio/video record law enforcement actions and other public activities that involve members of this department. In addition, this policy provides guidelines for situations where the recordings may be evidence.

425.2 POLICY
The Euless Police Department recognizes the right of persons to lawfully record members of this department who are performing their official duties. Members of this department will not prohibit or intentionally interfere with such lawful recordings. Any recordings that are deemed to be evidence of a crime or relevant to an investigation will only be collected or seized lawfully.

Officers should exercise restraint and should not resort to highly discretionary arrests for offenses such as interference, failure to comply or disorderly conduct as a means of preventing someone from exercising the right to record members performing their official duties.

425.3 RECORDING LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITY
Members of the public who wish to record law enforcement activities are limited only in certain aspects.

(a) Recordings may be made from any public place or any private property where the individual has the legal right to be present.

(b) Beyond the act of photographing or recording, individuals may not interfere with the law enforcement activity. Examples of interference include, but are not limited to:
   1. Tampering with a witness or suspect.
   2. Inciting others to violate the law.
   3. Being so close to the activity as to present a clear safety hazard to the officers.
   4. Being so close to the activity as to interfere with an officer’s effective communication with a suspect or witness.

(c) The individual may not present an undue safety risk to the officer, him/herself or others.

425.4 OFFICER RESPONSE
Officers should promptly request that a supervisor respond to the scene whenever it appears that anyone recording activities may be interfering with an investigation or it is believed that the recording may be evidence. If practicable, officers should wait for the supervisor to arrive before taking enforcement action or seizing any cameras or recording media.

Whenever practicable, officers or supervisors should give clear and concise warnings to individuals who are conducting themselves in a manner that would cause their recording or behavior to be unlawful. Accompanying the warnings should be clear directions on what an
individual can do to be compliant; directions should be specific enough to allow compliance. For example, rather than directing an individual to clear the area, an officer could advise the person that he/she may continue observing and recording from the sidewalk across the street.

If an arrest or other significant enforcement activity is taken as the result of a recording that interferes with law enforcement activity, officers shall document in a report the nature and extent of the interference or other unlawful behavior and the warnings that were issued.

425.5 SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES
A supervisor should respond to the scene when requested or any time the circumstances indicate a likelihood of interference or other unlawful behavior.

The supervisor should review the situation with the officer and:

(a) Request any additional assistance as needed to ensure a safe environment.
(b) Take a lead role in communicating with individuals who are observing or recording regarding any appropriate limitations on their location or behavior. When practical, the encounter should be recorded.
(c) When practicable, allow adequate time for individuals to respond to requests for a change of location or behavior.
(d) Ensure that any enforcement, seizure or other actions are consistent with this policy and constitutional and state law.
(e) Explain alternatives for individuals who wish to express concern about the conduct of department members, such as how and where to file a complaint.

425.6 SEIZING RECORDINGS AS EVIDENCE
Officers should not seize recording devices or media unless (42 USC § 2000aa):

(a) There is probable cause to believe the person recording has committed or is committing a crime to which the recording relates, and the recording is reasonably necessary for prosecution of the person.
   1. Absent exigency or consent, a warrant should be sought before seizing or viewing such recordings. Reasonable steps may be taken to prevent erasure of the recording.
(b) There is reason to believe that the immediate seizure of such recordings is necessary to prevent serious bodily injury or death of any person.
(c) The person consents.
   1. To ensure that the consent is voluntary, the request should not be made in a threatening or coercive manner.
   2. If the original recording is provided, a copy of the recording should be provided to the recording party, if practicable. The recording party should be permitted to be present while the copy is being made, if feasible. Another way to obtain the
Public Recording of Law Enforcement Activity

evidence is to transmit a copy of the recording from a device to a department-owned device.

Recording devices and media that are seized will be submitted within the guidelines of the Property Room Policy.
Media Relations

324.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE
This policy provides guidelines for the release of official department information to the media. It also addresses coordinating media access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies and other law enforcement activities.

324.2 POLICY
It is the policy of the Euless Police Department to protect the privacy rights of individuals, while releasing non-confidential information to the media regarding topics of public concern. Information that has the potential to negatively affect investigations will not be released.

324.3 RESPONSIBILITIES
The ultimate authority and responsibility for the release of information to the media shall remain with the Chief of Police. 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, Watch Commanders and designated Public Information Officers (PIOs) may prepare and release information to the media in accordance with this policy and applicable laws regarding confidentiality.

324.4 PROVIDING ADVANCE INFORMATION
To protect the safety and rights of department members 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 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 a minimum, whether the release of information or the presence of the media would unreasonably endanger any individual or prejudice the rights of any person or is otherwise prohibited by law.

324.5 MEDIA REQUESTS
Any media request for information or access to a law enforcement incident shall be referred to the PIO, or if unavailable, to the first available supervisor. Prior to releasing any information to the media, members shall consider the following:

(a) At no time shall any member of this department make any comment or release any official information to the media without prior approval from a supervisor or the PIO.

(b) In situations involving multiple agencies or government departments, 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 comment to the media regarding any law enforcement incident not involving this department without prior approval of the Chief of Police. Under these circumstances the member should direct the media to the agency handling the incident.

324.6 ACCESS
Authorized media representatives shall be provided access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies and other law enforcement activities as required by law.

Access by the media is subject to the following conditions:

(a) The media representative shall produce valid media credentials that shall be prominently displayed at all times while in areas otherwise closed to the public.

(b) Media representatives should be prevented from interfering and may be removed for interfering with emergency operations and criminal investigations.

1. Based upon available resources, 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) Media interviews with individuals who are in custody should not be permitted without the approval of the Chief of Police and the express written consent of the person in custody.

(d) No member of this department who is under investigation shall be subjected to media visits or interviews without the consent of the involved member.

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

324.6.2 TEMPORARY FLIGHT RESTRICTIONS
Whenever the presence of media or other aircraft pose a threat to public or member 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 Watch Commander. The TFR request should include specific information regarding the perimeter and altitude necessary for the incident and should be requested through the appropriate control tower.
324.7 CONFIDENTIAL OR RESTRICTED INFORMATION
It shall be the responsibility of the PIO to ensure that confidential or restricted information is not inappropriately released to the media (see the Records Maintenance and Release and Personnel Records policies). When in doubt, authorized and available legal counsel should be consulted prior to releasing any information.

324.7.1 EMPLOYEE INFORMATION
The identities of officers involved in shootings or other critical incidents may only be released to the media upon the consent of the involved officer or upon a formal request filed.

Any requests for copies of related reports or additional information not contained in the information log (see the Information Log section in this policy), including the identity of officers involved in shootings or other critical incidents, shall be referred to the PIO.

Requests should be reviewed and fulfilled by the Custodian of Records, or if unavailable, the Watch Commander or the authorized designee. Such requests will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Records Maintenance and Release Policy and public records laws (e.g., Texas Public Information Act).

324.8 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.