



National Press Photographers Association

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NPPA MODEL POLICE-PRESS POLICY

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POLICY

- A. The _____ Police Department (*PD) will strive to maintain an atmosphere of openness with both the public and the news media limited only by the mandates of law. The *PD is committed to informing the media and the public about events involving the Department. As a public agency, the *PD welcomes legitimate inquiries and all authorized personnel are encouraged to cooperate with members of the media regarding Departmental operations and activities consistent with this Order.
- B. The purpose of this policy is to remind members of the *PD of their obligations to cooperate with media representatives acting in a news-gathering capacity at the scene of police incidents.
- C. The public's access to information regarding the official business of the *PD is of critical importance to effective _____ government. Because the public receives much of this access through the news media, members of the service must ensure that *PD procedures, which provide for cooperation and assistance with press personnel and which allow press personnel to access the scenes of incidents, are carefully followed.
- D. These guidelines reflect the commitment of the *PD to upholding the principles of a free press and informed citizenry. I have determined that the *PD, the press and the public would benefit from this revised [General Order] providing certain specific guidance to members of the service.
- E. Any request for statistical information will be referred only to the _____ for approval, delegation and/or dissemination.
- F. The public information function is the responsibility of all *PD personnel. Under

certain circumstances, listed herein, only the staff assigned to the _____ will exercise this function.

- G. It shall be the policy of the *PD to actively seek to establish a cooperative atmosphere in which the news media may gather and disseminate information and visual images on matters of public interest in a manner that does not hamper law enforcement operations. It shall also be the policy of the *PD to cooperate with media representatives by not interfering or allowing others to interfere with media personnel acting in their news gathering capacity.
- H. All patrol officers and supervisory personnel shall cooperate with and assist the media representative and provide safe access to the scene, whenever possible.
- I. Members of the *PD who unreasonably interfere with media access to incidents or who intentionally prevent or obstruct the photographing or videotaping of news in public places will be subject to disciplinary action.
- J. It must be understood, however, that certain information may be withheld from the media in order to protect the constitutional rights of the accused; to avoid interfering with a department investigation; or because it is legally privileged.
- K. A member of the media shall not be excluded from an area where the general public has access. Media members shall include, but not be limited to: staff and freelance representatives of print publications (i.e. newspaper and magazine); electronic broadcast (i.e. radio and television); news and photo agencies; and/or Internet (i.e. websites and blogs) organizations.
- L. *PD personnel are reminded that photography and the videotaping of public places, buildings and structures are common activities within [Municipality] and as such, practically all such photography will have no connection to terrorism or unlawful conduct.
- M. The *PD recognizes that the taking of photographs and/or videos by private citizens and media members is permitted within areas open to general public access and occupancy.
- N. A civilian (including the media) may video record or photograph police activities and personnel so long as they remain at a reasonable distance and do not physically interfere with police duties and responsibilities.
- O. Members of the *PD shall not interfere with the videotaping or the photographing of incidents in public places. Intentional interference such as blocking or obstructing cameras or harassing a photographer constitutes censorship. In order to cooperate more fully with members of the news media and provide them with access to cover newsworthy events, the following guidelines will be adhered to unless safety interests or proper performance of police duties require otherwise:
 - 1. To the extent it is feasible to do so, the media's access to demonstrations on

private property will not be impeded by the *PD.

2. The media will be given access as close to the activity as possible, with a clear line of sight and within hearing range of the incident.
 3. When incidents spill over or occur on private property, members of the media will not be arrested for criminal trespass, unless an owner or representative expressly indicates that the press is not to be permitted to enter or remain on the property.
 4. If the ranking officer at the incident determines that press access must be restricted in certain circumstances (i.e., in order for the *PD to carry out its law enforcement functions), s/he retains the discretion to do so.
- P. Police personnel shall not order or participate in the destruction of portable video or photo recording devices; nor shall they delete, destroy or alter images/photographs/videos/audio recordings; or request any other person (including the person taking such images/photographs/videos/audio) to delete, destroy or alter any such images/photographs/videos/audio recordings.
- Q. Police personnel may not demand to view photographs taken by a person absent voluntary consent. Under exigent circumstances and when there is probable cause to believe that the camera, film, recording or other electronic media contains evidence of criminal activity, the item may be seized. **N.B.** A search warrant must be obtained prior to viewing its contents. [Departments should strongly consider inserting their own protocol for property search & seizure.]
- R. Commanding officers will ensure that the contents of this Order are brought to the attention of members of their commands on a regular basis. [**N.B.** Departments should strongly consider inserting their own chain of command protocol.]