

DEPARTMENTAL GENERAL ORDER 16-68

ST. LOUIS COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF POLICE

Q-1
April 13, 2016

Index as:

Media Policy
News Media Policy
Public Information
Release of Information

Cancels:

General Order 11-68

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND NEWS MEDIA POLICY

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this General Order is to establish policy and procedures for the distribution of information regarding the activities and performance of the Department to the general public through the facilities of print, broadcast and electronic media inquiries. **This Department recognizes that protecting the constitutional guarantees of both fair trial and free press is a responsibility of the police.**

II. POLICY

- A. **The St. Louis County Police Department is committed to working cooperatively with the media to keep the public informed. It shall be the policy of the St. Louis County Police Department 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 Department to cooperate with media representatives by not interfering or allowing others to interfere with media personnel acting in their news gathering capacity.**
- B. **It is recognized that in most instances the objectives of the Department and the media are the same, informing and educating the public regarding matters affecting them. To this end, all members of the Department shall foster a professional relationship with the media.**
- C. **While the Department is committed to informing the public about events it is handling or involved in, the Department is also responsible to ensure the dissemination of information will not interfere with the rights of victims, hinder an investigation or impair a defendant's right to a fair trial.**

III. DEFINITION

Recorded Media - Still photographs, video and audio recordings in any format.

IV. PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

The **Public Information Office** within the Office of the Chief of Police is comprised of the following:

- A. **Supervisor, Public Information Office**
- B. **Media Relations Officer**
- C. **Social Media Coordinator**

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"Public Information and News Media Policy"*

The Administrative Aide to the Chief of Police will be assigned the responsibilities identified in Section V in the event the members of the Public Information Office are unavailable.

V. PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. The Public Information Office disseminates information through the media and acts as liaison between the Department and the media. Information is provided equally to all media outlets.
- B. The Public Information Office will assist the media in resolving problems of mutual concern.
1. Department employees shall immediately notify the Public Information Office of conflicts and/or concerns that arise with the media.
 2. Members of the Public Information Office are authorized and shall immediately assist with resolving real-time police/media conflicts by conferring with the on-scene supervisor to produce an appropriate resolution.
 3. Concerns from Department members regarding the media shall be brought to the attention of the Public Information Office through the Department member's chain-of-command. The Public Information Office shall investigate the allegation and shall discuss the matter with the media representative and his/her organization, if necessary. The Public Information Office will advise the concerned Department employee of the outcome in a timely manner.
- C. The Public Information Office's responsibilities include but are not limited to:
1. Establish and maintain liaison with news media representatives through direct contact;
 2. Prepare written news releases and distribute after approval by the Chief of Police or the Supervisor of the Public Information Office;
 3. Inform media of photo opportunities that would be advantageous to the Department and the public;
 4. Direct media to appropriate information sources within the Department for news stories;
 5. Assist news personnel in covering news stories at the scenes of major incidents, to include coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses and suspects, in accordance with the Missouri State Sunshine Law;
 6. Serve as spokesperson on major scenes or other scenes deemed relevant at the discretion of the Chief of Police or the Supervisor of the Public Information Office;
 7. After normal business hours, Department personnel can contact the Public Information Officer through the Bureau of Communications regarding an incident

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which requires immediate attention, or any incident that has generated media interest;

8. Arrange for and assist at news conferences;
 9. Assist and advise on media related or crisis situations within the Department;
 10. Involve the news media representatives in the development of changes to this policy;
 11. **Coordinate, review and maintain information placed on the Department Internet site;**
 12. **Coordinate and run all social media accounts for the Department; and**
 13. Coordinate and authorize the release of information concerning confidential agency investigations and operations when directed by the Chief of Police.
- D. When the St. Louis County Police Department is involved in a mutual effort with other public safety agencies, the **Public Information Office** will:
1. Serve as noted above when the Department is the lead or primary investigating agency unless asked by the primary agency to comment on assistance or resources provided;
 2. Refer all media requests to the lead or primary investigating agency when the St. Louis County Police Department is an assisting agency;
 3. Assist other agencies at the request of the Chief of Police.

VI. RELEASE OF INFORMATION

- A. The Department will respond to information requests from the news media, subject to legal constraints and the necessity to preserve evidence, when the requested information does not hinder investigations, violate the constitutional rights of the accused, identify individuals with protected status, or otherwise violate Missouri or federal law.
- B. The scope and content of each release of information, whether written or oral, must be determined on a case-by-case basis. Generally, a description of the circumstances that is not privileged and will not prejudice the safety of victims or witnesses, or the right of suspects, or hinder an investigation, will be released.
- C. All media inquiries not related to an issued press release or a developing situation may be referred to the Public Information Office.
- D. Department employees shall be open in dealing with the media. Unless there is reason to withhold information consistent with this order, employees may supply appropriately requested information or contact the Public Information Office to release that information.
- E. When possible, information should be provided to the media by the employee at the lowest administrative level of the Department who has specific knowledge of the incident in question. If that employee or their supervisor requires direction regarding

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the release of information or are not able to make the release, they should contact the **Public Information Office** for advice or assistance. Notification shall be made to the **Public Information Office** anytime information is released to a media representative, prior to the release when practical.

- F. The scene supervisor shall ensure that the basic facts of the occurrence are transmitted from the incident scene to the Bureau of Communications supervisor or the **Public Information Officer** when media interest in the incident is expected.
- G. The precinct watch commander shall ensure that notification is made to the next watch in a timely manner when media interest already exists or is expected.
- H. Types of information that can normally be released to the media include the following:
 - 1. Routine Crime News

The Daily Crime Summary (Hot Sheet)
 - 2. Incident Reports
 - a. Basic information regarding an incident to which police have responded may be provided to media representatives. This information is defined as the Incident Report under the Missouri Sunshine Law (2009) and includes the date, time, specific location, name of the victim and immediate facts and circumstances or nature of a crime or incident. Care must be taken not to release information that could interfere with a successful criminal investigation. The identities of juvenile offenders, the names of sex crime victims, their identifying characteristics and the names and exact addresses of crime witnesses should not be released.
 - b. Department employees who are uninformed on the subject of a media inquiry or who have reservations concerning the release of information will refer the media representative making the inquiry to the **Public Information Office**.
 - c. **In all deaths, the identity of the deceased shall be withheld from the media until the next of kin has been notified or until a reasonable effort has been made to make said notification.**
 - 3. Investigative Reports
 - a. A record other than an arrest or incident report by law enforcement personnel regarding a crime or suspected crime is defined as an Investigative Report under the Missouri Sunshine Law (2009).
 - b. Evidence: So as not to prejudice future prosecution, avoid the release of the specific type of evidence that links an arrested suspect to a crime. Such evidence is part of the Investigative Report.
 - 4. Major Incident News
 - a. The **Public Information Office** will respond to the scene of major incidents at the request of the scene commander when extensive media coverage is anticipated.

- b. The **Public Information Office** will stay in communication with the on-scene commander or Bureau of Communications to keep informed about developments.
- c. Reporter briefings will be scheduled by the **Public Information Office** as the situation dictates.

5. Information To Be Released By Chief of Police

Only the Chief of Police or designated representative may release information regarding Department policies, administrative activities or internal police matters to the news media.

- 6. All Open Records/Sunshine requests and requests for statistics from members of the media should be submitted to the Custodian of Records. Members of the media may contact the **Public Information Office** to facilitate such requests.

VII. MEDIA INTERVIEWS

Media interviews are permitted with members of the Department concerning incidents/investigations they are assigned to or law enforcement topics about which they have direct knowledge. These interviews may be conducted after receiving permission from their supervisor or the scene supervisor, and notification has been made to the **Public Information Office**. Limit answers to known facts and avoid expressing opinions or hypothetical comparisons.

Department employees will be professional and courteous in all of their dealings with members of the media.

A. Individual Interviews

The appropriate personnel to answer reporter questions at a minor crime/accident scene may be the first responder or their supervisor. Regarding a major incident, the appropriate personnel to answer reporter questions are the scene commander, the precinct commander, division commanding officer, chief investigator or the **Public Information Office**. The **Public Information Office** shall be notified of all media interviews given by an employee of the Department. This notification should precede the interview when practical.

B. News Conference

A news conference format with one or more representatives may be utilized when the Department has information it wishes to distribute to as many media representatives as possible at the same time. The **Public Information Office** will be notified prior to the news conference, and offer any assistance necessary. Once notified, the **Public Information Office** will advise the media of the time, place and subject matter of the news conference and may prepare a written news release for distribution to reporters who attend.

VIII. ARREST INFORMATION

A. Identification

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Adult suspects arrested for criminal violations may be identified to the media by name, age and address. The arrest record is open for 30 days. If the person arrested is not charged with an offense within this 30-day period, the arrest record becomes a closed record and therefore will not be released. A warrant taken under advisement is not a closed report until the 30-day period is complete or status changed to an applicable charge.

B. Prisoner Status

When coverage is anticipated pertaining to an arrest, the **Public Information Office** is to be notified by the employee responsible for the case. When or if warrants are issued, a copy of the signed warrant and **probable cause statement** should be faxed or delivered or emailed to the **Public Information Office**.

C. Mugshots /Photographs

Mugshots of arrested suspects (within 30 days of the arrest if no charges), wanted suspects who jeopardize public safety and suspects with prior convictions based on our Department's investigation may be released to the media with permission of the case officer or case supervisor (except juvenile offenders). Mug shots of individuals arrested by other law enforcement agencies should be released by that agency and/or the Department of Justice Services. Arrested suspects may be photographed by the media while being escorted by police, however, walking a suspect past the media for the sole purpose of allowing photographs to be taken is not permissible.

IX. MEDIA ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE AND SCENES

A. Access to the Public Information Office

The staff of the **Public Information Office** is available for routine information requests and news story development between the hours of 8:00 AM and 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday. Any requests for the **Public Information Office** after business hours and on weekends, for breaking news or items that require immediate attention, should be directed to the Bureau of Communications at 636-529-8210, who will contact the on-call member of the **Public Information Office**.

B. Crime/Accident Scenes

Crime scene security will be maintained at all times by all law enforcement personnel. Media access at crime scenes will be strictly monitored so as not to interfere with any ongoing investigation, although they will have access to all locations made available to the general public. A designated media assembly area should be established, and all media personnel should be addressed at that location. The on-scene commander will determine any further media access.

The **Public Information Office** shall cooperate with and assist media representatives and help facilitate safe access to the scene, whenever possible.

C. NOTIFICATION REGARDING SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

1. The **Public Information Office**, as well as all supervisory personnel, shall be cognizant of the role and responsibility of the media to obtain information for dissemination to the public. All scene commanders shall make available

to members of the media, via the Public Information Office, information pertaining to newsworthy incidents, including the release of information regarding crimes.

2. The Public Information Office shall be notified by the Bureau of Communications, without unnecessary delay, of details of newsworthy matters. Newsworthy events, include, but are not limited to the following:
 - a. All homicides
 - b. Traffic fatalities
 - c. Officer-Involved shootings
 - d. Details of any other event or occurrence of unusual nature (explosions, riots, mass arrests, bombings, hazardous material spills, found or detonated explosive devices, etc.).
3. The on-call member of the Public Information Office will contact the on-scene commander or officer responsible for the scene after the situation is stabilized and information is available for release. Only limited information regarding in-progress situations will be released due to their dynamic nature.
4. Supplementary information/ updates shall be promptly provided to the on-call member of the Public Information Office as conditions permit.
5. The ranking supervisory officer, commander, or commanding officer on the scene of a major incident or investigation shall ensure that the Public Information Office is promptly notified.
6. When significantly new information or information that is substantially different from what was included in the original news release is to be released, the Public Information Office shall be immediately notified.

D. News Helicopters

In the event that a news helicopter enters an area and creates noise which interferes with ground communication or jeopardizes officer safety, an on-scene supervisor should contact the on-call member of the Public Information Office or the communication supervisor to make the proper notifications necessary to establish a no fly zone. Metro Air Support helicopter pilots are authorized to make the notification directly if they are instructed to do so by an on-scene supervisor or deem the notification is necessary for their safety.

E. Media Access

1. Members 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.
2. Department employees shall not unreasonably interfere with media access to incidents or intentionally prevent or obstruct the photographing or videotaping of news in public places. Intentional interference such as

*Departmental General Order 10-00,
"Public Information and News Media Policy"*

blocking or obstructing cameras or harassing a photographer constitutes censorship.

3. In order to cooperate more fully with members of the news media and provide them with access to cover newsworthy events, the following will be adhered to unless safety interests or proper performance of police duties require otherwise:
 - a. The media will be given access as close to the activity as feasible, with a clear line of sight and within hearing range of the incident.
 - b. When incidents spill over or occur on private property, members of the media will not be arrested, or threatened with arrest for criminal trespass or otherwise, unless an owner or representative expressly indicates that the press is not to be permitted to enter or remain on the property.
 - c. If the senior officer at the incident determines that press access must be restricted in certain circumstances (i.e. in order for the Department to carry out its law enforcement functions) he/she retains the discretion to do so.
4. Although preferable, members of the media are not required to possess or display media identification cards, press passes or other forms of identification in locations open to the public. Access to press conferences will require some form of media identification.

Note: It must be remembered that "public access equals media access," regardless of the subject matter to be observed. Members of the media cannot be restricted from entering and/or producing recorded media from areas that are open to the public, regardless of subject matter, including plainclothes and/or undercover operations that are conducted in public view.

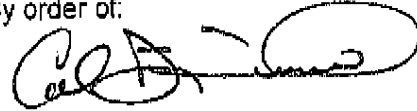
- a. Department employees will attempt to identify members of the media who have produced recorded media containing plainclothes and/or undercover operations or personnel. The Department employees may request the member of the media not release portions of the media containing sensitive plainclothes and/or undercover operations, or conceal/blur prior to dissemination.
 - b. Department employees will immediately notify the Public Information Office of the aforementioned situation and a representative from the Public Information Office will immediately contact the respective media outlet to reiterate said request.
5. In the event of a dispute as to access, supervisors of significant police incidents and/or crime scenes shall promptly request that a representative from the Public Information Office shall respond to the scene to assist Department employees and the media in fulfilling their joint expectations.

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Adopted by Command Staff


By order of:



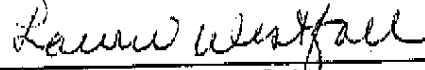
COLONEL JON M. BELMAR
Chief of Police

JB:rm

Approved at the regular Board meeting on April 13, 2016



MR. ROLAND J. CORVINGTON
Chairman



MS. LAURIE L. WESTFALL
Secretary

Distribution

All Department Personnel

CALEA Reference

54.1.1; 54.1.2; 54.1.3