

CAMBRIDGE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Title: ***MEDIA RELATIONS AND
PUBLIC INFORMATION***

Procedure: 5.000

Date Issued:

Revised:

PURPOSE:

To establish guidelines for the release of information to the news media.

To provide the news media and public with timely and accurate information regarding Department activities.

To ensure that a police investigation is not jeopardized by the premature release of information.

POLICY:

The Police Department actively seeks to establish a cooperative climate in which the news media may obtain information on matters of public interest in a manner that does not hamper police operations. The Department is committed to informing the community and the news media of events within the public domain. However, certain information must be withheld from the media to protect the constitutional rights of an accused, to avoid interfering with a Department investigation, or because it is legally privileged.

PROCEDURE:

PUBLIC INFORMATION FUNCTION

1. The Public Information Officer is responsible for the public information function of the Department. This function will include, but is not limited to:

assisting news personnel in covering routine news stories, and at the scene of incidents when so required;

being available for on-call responses to the news media;
preparing and distributing formal news releases;

arranging for, and assisting at news conferences;

coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects;

assisting in crisis situations within the Department; and,

coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential Department investigations and operations.

2. The Public Information Officer will provide any basic information for an initial press release that is appropriate and falls within the scope of their assignment.

3. Police Officers who are approached by members of the news media for information concerning official activities of the Department are to refer all such inquiries to either their supervisor or the Public Information Officer.

4. Department personnel authorized to release information to the news media under the following categories are:

AT THE SCENE OF AN INCIDENT

Chief of Police
Staff Officer
Public Information Officer
On Duty Supervisor

FROM AGENCY FILES

Chief of Police or his designee

CONCERNING AN ONGOING INVESTIGATION

Chief of Police
Staff Officer
Public Information Officer

FORMAL NEWS RELEASE

- Chief of Police
- Staff Officer
- Public Information Officer

EMERGENCY NEWS RELEASE

- Chief of Police
- Staff Officer
- Public Information Officer
- On Duty Supervisor

NEWS MEDIA / AT SCENE ACCESS

1. The Department does not issue Press credentials. However, the Department will deny access to the scene of an incident or its reports to any news media member who cannot present positive identification as a representative of a public news service.

2. Police lines may be established to prevent persons from entering the area of a serious incident or crime scene. Dependent upon the tactical situation and the likelihood of jeopardizing police operations, members of the news media may or may not be allowed in such area.

3. While members of the media may be permitted in the area of a crime or serious police incident, they do not have the authority to be within a crime scene or area which has been secured to preserve evidence or at any location where their presence jeopardizes a police operation.

4. Supervisors may allow access to news media representatives, including photographers, at the scene of major fires, natural disasters, or other catastrophic events; and the perimeter of crime scenes depending on the need to preserve evidence and maintain order.

NEWS RELEASES

1. News releases are divided into three (3) categories. The frequency and content of the release depends upon the objective desired. Normally releases will be provided to those media agencies that have a direct relationship with the service community. The three types of news releases are:

ONGOING INVESTIGATION - Any information provided to the news media by the on duty Supervisor will be documented and provided to the Public Information Officer as soon as possible. It is important that all releases contain the same information. If possible a printed release will be prepared for publication by the Public Information Officer. The Chief of Police, Staff Officer, CID Supervisor or the Public Information Officer **MAY RELEASE** the following information:

The type of crime or nature of incident.

The location (certain restrictions apply), date, time, injuries sustained, damaged property and a brief description of the incident.

Amount and type of property taken, including value if known.

The name, age, and address of any adult charged with a crime.

The fact that a juvenile has been taken into custody, including sex, age, and general area of residence.

The nature, substance or text of the charge.

The facts, time and place of arrest.

The next step in the judicial process.

Requests for aid in locating evidence, a complainant, or a suspect. The identity of a suspect before arrest will not be disclosed except to the extent necessary to aid in the investigation, to assist in the apprehension of the suspect, or to warn the public of any danger. A person's race may be released as descriptive information in such cases.

Available photographs may be released only if they serve a valid law enforcement function such as the identity of the victim or to enlist public assistance in the apprehension of the offender.

In situations where multiple jurisdictions or agencies have participated in the case, all inquiries by the media should be directed to the Public Information Officer. Supervisors from these jurisdictions should be consulted to plan and authorize a joint release, if required.

PUBLIC RELATIONS - The Public Information Officer shall be responsible for issuing public relation news releases. Information should be provided on a regular basis to all media agencies that have contact within the department's service area. The content of the news releases may include:

Department accomplishments.

New program announcements.

Crime prevention information.

Relevant crime problems and statistics.

Appointments and promotions.

EMERGENCY NEWS RELEASE -

Whenever there is an immediate need to inform the general public concerning an emergency, any supervisor on duty may contact the news media and issue a press release. The need for such release will depend upon the severity of the situation and the need for the public to be informed. In special situations of public concern such as natural disaster (tornadoes, severe wind or rain storms, etc.), a major fire or a chemical spill, any supervisor on duty may issue a press release at his discretion. Comments to reporters should be comprised only of factual, on-the-record information. In general, comments to the news media concerning investigations, indictments, arrests and criminal incidents should be minimal, consistent with the responsibility of keeping the public informed without jeopardizing the rights of individuals.

WITHHOLDING INFORMATION

1. The following information WILL NOT be released:

Any victim, complainant, or witness information such as identity, address, phone number, age, etc., in the following instances:

The information is contained in an on-going investigation whereby release of such information may jeopardize successful resolution and/or prosecution of the case.

The information is contained in any sex offense or sex related investigation which, if divulged, would tend to lead to the victim's identification.

Law enforcement officers may not disclose the identity of any juvenile in releasing information to the general public as to the arrest, investigation or disposition of any case involving a juvenile;

The identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to notification of next of kin;

The specific cause of death, until determined by the Medical Examiner;

Exact information concerning an on going investigation, whether it be a crime or traffic accident, will not be released if the information would jeopardize the investigation or prosecution of a subject;

The existence or contents of any confession, admission, or statement given by the accused, or the refusal or failure of the accused to make any statement;

The performance of any examination or tests, or the refusal or failure to submit to an examination or test by the accused;

Any prior criminal records, including arrests, indictments, and other charges of crime, or the character or reputation of the accused;

Statements concerning the testimony or credibility of a prospective witness;

Any reference to the possibility of a plea of guilty or the possibility of a plea to a lesser offense;

Personal opinions as to the accused guilt or innocence, or to the evidence or merits of the case;

The identity of suspects that are interviewed but not charged will not be released;

The identity of any informant;

Confidential intelligence or operations will not be disclosed except by express permission of the Chief of Police;

Sensitive or investigative information concerning internal investigations or personnel matters.

Any information strictly prohibited by federal or state law.

MEDIA REVIEW

1. This department will involve the news media in the development of changes in policies and procedures relating to the public information function by allowing them to review and comment on this procedure.