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## Media Relations

### 323.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidelines for media releases and media access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies and other law enforcement activities allowing the prompt release of records in accordance with the mandates of the Ohio Public Records Law (ORC § 149.43).

### 323.2 RESPONSIBILITIES

The ultimate authority and responsibility for the release of information to the media shall remain with the Chief of Police. However, 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 the designated Public Information Officer may prepare and release information to the media in accordance with this policy and the applicable law.

Any member, who makes an unauthorized release, or releases protected information, is subject to severe disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Among the information that members will not be permitted to be released without the expressed permission of the Chief of Police, or designee are: interpretations of, or announced changes in policies or personnel of the Department, information regarding strikes or labor disputes, photographs to attorneys, insurance companies, or any person for use or possible use in any civil action, except on receipt of a court order (or subpoena) or a proper public records request. Such person having legitimate interest in the subject matter shall be allowed to view photographs upon request.

#### 323.2.1 MEDIA REQUEST

Any media request for information or access to a law enforcement situation shall be referred to the designated Department media representative, or if unavailable, to the first available supervisor. Prior to releasing any information to the media, employees shall consider the following:

- (a) At no time shall any employee of this department make any comment or release any official information to the media without prior approval from a supervisor or the designated Department media representative.
- (b) In situations involving multiple law enforcement agencies, 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 comments to the media regarding any law enforcement incident not involving this department without prior approval of the Chief of Police.

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#### **323.3 MEDIA ACCESS**

Authorized and bona fide members of the media should be provided access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies and other law enforcement activities (ORC § 2917.13(B)).

Access by the media is subject to the following conditions:

- (a) The media representative shall produce valid press credentials that shall be prominently displayed at all times while in areas otherwise closed to the public.
- (b) Media representatives may be prevented from interfering with emergency operations and criminal investigations.
  - 1. Reasonable effort should be made to provide media representatives with access to a media command post, separate from the operations command post, near the location of the incident providing it will not interfere with emergency operations or a criminal investigation.
- (c) No member of this department shall be required to submit to media visits or interviews without the consent of the involved employee.
- (d) Media interviews with individuals who are in custody shall not be permitted unless in compliance with a jail facility policy. Exceptions are only permitted with the approval of the Chief of Police and the express written consent of the person in custody.

A tactical operation should be handled in the same manner as a crime scene, except the news media shall be permitted within the outer perimeter of the scene, subject to any restrictions as determined by the supervisor in charge. Department members shall not jeopardize a tactical operation in order to accommodate the news media. All comments to the media shall be coordinated through a supervisor or the Public Information Officer.

##### **323.3.1 MEDIA AT JOINT-OPERATIONS**

Unless this Department has primary jurisdiction in a joint operation with other agencies, members will not release information to the media. However, a member will be assigned to work with the Public Information Officer from the agency with primary jurisdiction.

##### **323.3.2 TEMPORARY FLIGHT RESTRICTIONS**

Whenever the presence of media or other aircraft pose a threat to public or officer 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. It should be requested through the appropriate control tower. If the control tower is not known, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) should be contacted (14 CFR § 91.137).

##### **323.3.3 PROVIDING ADVANCE INFORMATION**

To protect the safety and rights of officers 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 news media nor should media

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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 minimum, whether the release of information or presence of the media would unreasonably endanger any individual, prejudice the rights of any person or is otherwise prohibited by law.

#### **323.4 SCOPE OF INFORMATION SUBJECT TO RELEASE**

The Department will maintain a daily information log of significant law enforcement activities that shall be made available, upon request, to media representatives through the Watch Commander. This log will consist of data classified as public and should generally contain:

- (a) The date, time, location, case number, type of crime, extent of injury or loss and names of individuals (except confidential informants) involved in crimes occurring within this jurisdiction, unless the release of such information would endanger the safety of any individual or jeopardize the successful completion of any ongoing investigation.
- (b) The date, time, location, case number, name, birth date and charges for each person arrested by this department, unless the release of such information would endanger the safety of any individual or jeopardize the successful completion of any ongoing investigation.
- (c) The time and location of other significant law enforcement activities or requests for service with a brief summary of the incident subject to the restrictions of this policy and applicable law.

Identifying information concerning deceased individuals should only be released to the media when the decedent's identity has been verified and the release is approved by a supervisor.

Any requests for copies of related reports or additional information not contained in this log shall be referred to the designated media representative, the custodian of records, or if unavailable, to the Watch Commander. Such requests will generally be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Ohio Public Records Act (ORC § 149.43). Questions concerning the mandates of the Ohio Public Records Act should be resolved through legal counsel.

##### **323.4.1 STATE RESTRICTED INFORMATION**

It shall be the responsibility of the authorized employee dealing with media requests to ensure that restricted information is not inappropriately released to the media by this department (see the Records Maintenance and Release and the Personnel Records policies). When in doubt, authorized and available legal counsel should be obtained.