



## Clayton County Police Department

# PROCEDURES

Subject <b>PUBLIC INFORMATION &amp; MEDIA RELATIONS</b>		Procedure # <b>G2</b>	
Authorizing Signature <b>Chief Michael Register</b>	Effective <b>02-08-2014</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> New <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Amended (see below) <input type="checkbox"/> Rescinds	Total Pages <b>9</b>

### I. PURPOSE

This Department must have the support of the community to be successful. Establishing and maintaining an effective relationship with the news media is crucial to accomplishing this goal.

This procedure establishes guidelines regarding media relations and the release of information to the public through the news media.

### II. POLICY

This Department actively seeks to establish a cooperative environment in which the news media may obtain information on matters of public interest without hampering departmental operations. However, certain information will be withheld from the news media to protect the privacy of individuals and the constitutional rights of the accused, to avoid interference with a departmental investigation, or because it is legally privileged.

It is the policy of this Department and its employees to cooperate with the news media personnel, whenever possible, in the release of information. Release of such information will be made without partiality and will not be withheld in favor of a particular agency or representative.

### **III. RESPONSIBILITY**

- A. The public information function of the Department is the responsibility of the Chief of Police, or designee. In the absence of the Chief of Police, designated Public Information Officer (PIO) or Community Liaison, the public release of information related to police matters will be handled as set forth in this policy.
  
- B. The PIO will also be responsible for the following:
  - 1. Assisting the news media with covering routine news stories, and at the scenes of incidents;
  - 2. Being available for on-call responses to the news media;
  - 3. Preparing and distributing departmentally-approved news or press releases, and maintaining records of the press releases;
  - 4. Arranging and assisting with news or press conferences;
  - 5. Coordinating the release of information about victims, witnesses and suspects, when authorized;
  - 6. Assisting with critical incidents and crisis situations within the Department (e.g., officer-involved shootings; line of duty deaths; etc.);
  - 7. Coordinating the release of information concerning confidential departmental investigations and operations, when authorized;
  - 8. Developing procedures for releasing information when other public safety agencies are involved in a mutual effort; and
  - 9. Disseminating the public release of information pertaining to significant incidents and/or special events that involve departmental investigations and activities.

### **IV. MEDIA ACCESS**

- A. Allowing News Media to Enter Area of a Serious Incident or Crime Scene

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 those areas. Authorization for entry is normally dependent upon judgment of the supervisor present. While members of the news media may be permitted in the area of a crime scene or a serious incident, they do not have the authority to be within an area which has been

secured to preserve evidence, or at any location where their presence jeopardizes police operations. It shall be the responsibility of the PIO or the scene supervisor to establish a media briefing area.

B. News Media Not Exempt from Laws

The primary responsibility of the news media is to report the news by obtaining information and photographs of newsworthy incidents. Their opportunity to do so is frequently at an emergency scene. However, members of the news media are neither implicitly nor expressly exempt from the requirements of any municipal, state, or federal statute.

C. Requesting Withholding of Publication

News professionals may photograph or report anything they observe when legally present at any emergency scene. When publication of this coverage would interfere with an official investigation or place a victim, suspect, or others in jeopardy, the withholding of publication is based on decisions of a cooperative press, not censorship by the Department. Under these circumstances, the PIO or supervisor on the scene, should advise the media representative of any impending jeopardy of the possible consequences of publication. However, officers may not interfere with news media activities as long as the media representatives' performance remains within the confines of the law.

D. Photography

Departmental employees will neither encourage nor discourage the media from photographing or televising defendants when they are in public places. Departmental employees will not position or pose the accused for the benefit of the media.

E. No preferential treatment will be accorded any representative of the news media. This statement will neither be construed to prohibit initial reporting, nor will it require notifying all news media prior to the release of information.

**V. RELEASE OF INFORMATION TO MEDIA BY DESIGNATED PERSONNEL**

The following procedures shall apply to circumstances involving the public release of information through the news media or any other source, and may only be superseded by the discretion, authority and order of the Chief of Police:

A. The public release of information shall be dictated by defined priority levels:

LEVEL 1: Officer-involved deadly and non-deadly force incidents; officer-involved motor vehicle accidents resulting in serious injury or death; departmental employees arrested for criminal offenses while on or off duty; officer deaths in the line of duty; internal investigations; incidents demanding formal press conferences (e.g., natural or man-made disasters that result in multiple deaths, injuries or mass casualties, hazardous materials, etc.).

LEVEL 2: Forcible felonies committed against persons; hate crimes; death investigations; officer-involved motor vehicle accidents resulting in minor or no injury; motor vehicle accidents resulting in serious injury or death; juvenile offender(s) who are charged as adults with criminal offenses; mutual-aid incidents; misdemeanor offenses; property crimes; victimless incidents.

- B. The public release of information through the news media or any other source shall be based on the aforementioned priority levels and performed by the following designated personnel:

LEVEL 1: Chief of Police, or designee; Deputy Chief of Police.

LEVEL 2: Community Affairs Unit personnel and/or PIO; Community Liaison; Division Commanders; Sector, Shift, and/or Unit supervisors (rank of sergeant or higher).

- C. Confirming Incident Types or Making Verbal Statements to the News Media

1. All Level 2 personnel (as defined above) are permitted to confirm the incident type (e.g., officer-involved shooting; death investigation; civil disturbance; etc.) while on the scene of the initial incident, regardless of the priority level of the incident.
2. All verbal statements beyond confirmations of incident types shall only be made by Level 2 personnel who possess sufficient knowledge of the incident, either personally or due to a thorough briefing by other personnel with sufficient knowledge.

In addition to departmental guidelines and applicable law regarding the public release of information, verbal statements shall adhere to the following guidelines:

- a. The public release of identifying information of victims of sexual assault is prohibited.
- b. The public release of identifying information of juveniles involved in any investigation is only permissible with authorization from the Chief of Police.
- c. The public release of identifying information of suspects involved in any investigation is only permissible with authorization from the concerned Division Commander, Deputy Chief of Police or Chief of Police.
- d. The public release of any information that could compromise or damage the integrity or continuity of an investigation is prohibited.

### 3. Non-Supervisory Personnel

- a. Non-supervisory personnel, below the rank of sergeant, are prohibited from making confirmations of incident types to the public or news media, unless authorized or directed to do so by a supervisor, the rank of sergeant or higher.
- b. Non-supervisory personnel, below the rank of sergeant, are prohibited from making any verbal statements beyond confirmations of incident types.
- c. E911/Communications Center personnel are authorized to confirm the status of current, in-progress motor vehicle accident investigations or other accidents, as they pertain to street hazards and/or closings, during time periods of high traffic volume.

### 4. Public Release of Departmental Records

See procedure *E4: Central Records & Permits* regarding the public release of departmental records (e.g., Incident Reports; forms; etc.).

## VI. REQUIRED PIO NOTIFICATION

- A. Any supervisor, the rank of sergeant or higher, who makes verbal statements, beyond confirmations of incident types, to the news media or any other public source is required to immediately notify his/her chain of command and the on-call PIO. The supervisor will provide all of the details of the information released to the news media or other public source.

The supervisor's notification shall also include a follow-up email and/or memorandum outlining the details of the verbal statements and/or information released. The email and/or memorandum will be forwarded through chain of command, the departmental report notification list, and the Community Affairs Unit using the County email system.

- B. Regardless of the presence of or inquiry by the news media, the following incident types require immediate notification of the on-call PIO, concerned chain of command and Chief of Police:
1. Any incident involving the serious injury or death of an officer;
  2. Any major crime of a high and aggravated nature (i.e., homicide; multiple deaths or shootings; etc.);
  3. Officer-involved shootings;
  4. Traffic fatalities;
  5. Traffic accidents involving serious or life threatening injuries to an officer, civilian or suspect, resulting from a motor vehicle pursuit;
  6. Any accidents resulting in structural damage to a house, apartment building or business;
  7. Any SWAT Team activations;
  8. Any Bomb Squad activations;
  9. Any major incidents involving mass transportation (i.e., planes, trains, or buses, etc.);

10. Any situation where a suspicious device is located;
11. Arrests of dignitaries or prominent people; and
12. Hate crimes.

## **VII. PIO NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES**

- A. When notification of the PIO is required, supervisors shall contact the PIO using the **Public Information Officer (PIO) Line, 678-610-4781**.

If the concerned supervisor is unable to establish contact with the on-call PIO via cellular phone after 1700 hours, then the on-call PIO shall be called at his/her home/residence.

- B. Between the hours of 2400 to 0700 hours, if an incident occurs that is not a priority, and the Shift and/or Unit Commander believes that the incident will not attract immediate media attention, then the Shift and/or Unit Commander should forward an email, with detailed information about the incident, to the departmental report notification list so the PIO may be aware of the incident the following morning.
- C. If the on-call PIO does not respond to the scene of an incident due to the circumstances, the concerned Shift and/or Unit Commander shall forward an email, with detailed information about the incident and that the on-call PIO was notified, to the departmental report notification list.

## **VIII. PIO RESPONSIBILITIES**

- A. It shall be the responsibility of the on-call PIO who responds to the scene of an incident type listed above in **subsection VI.B.** to immediately notify the Chief of Police, or designee. Immediate notification is not required if the on-call PIO does not respond to the scene.
- B. Formal departmental press releases, which are written or typed, will only be prepared by a designated PIO and/or Community Liaison and shall be approved or authorized by the Chief of Police, or designee, prior to release. Press releases should generally be short in length, one (1) page or less, yet contain sufficient information. Press releases may be faxed to local media outlets as necessary.

## **IX. PRESS CONFERENCES**

Press conferences will only be held in connection with major events of concern to the community. Only the Chief Of Police may call for a formal press conference. The designated PIO or Community Liaison will facilitate the coordination and scheduling of a press conference.

## **X. MEDIA RIDE-A-LONGS**

Media ride-a-longs allow members of the media to accompany law enforcement officers as they perform their duties. All ride-a-longs will abide by the established procedure of this Department. See procedure *G1: Community Affairs & Crime Prevention* regarding departmental ride-a-longs.

Employees shall neither permit members of the media to accompany them onto private property nor will they assist in securing permission for access from property owners.

## **XI. TRAINING**

The Department is committed to providing proper training for its Public Information Officers (PIO) and Community Liaison. Personnel authorized to publicly release information or interact with the news media will be provided access to appropriate training.

## **XII. ETHICS**

It is the policy of this agency to treat members of the media with professionalism and ethical behavior. It is expected that the media will respond in a like manner and follow ethical guidelines established by their industry.

Departmental personnel who believe they were treated unethically by the media should contact the PIO.

## **XIII. LIVE COVERAGE AGREEMENTS**

Live coverage agreements establish voluntary guidelines for the broadcast of the live pictures or information from critical incidents scenes (i.e., hostage situations; barricaded subjects; other ongoing crises; etc.). This Department supports the creation, implementation and use of such agreements.

## **XIV. MEDIA CREDENTIALS**

This Department acknowledges representatives from recognized media organizations who carry and/or display photographic identification issued by their employer. Anyone else is considered a member of the general public.



## **XV. ALTERNATIVE METHODS TO DISSEMINATE INFORMATION**

It is the policy of this Department to pursue alternative methods of disseminating information directly to the public. These may include community newsletters, government access cable television shows, internet websites, public appearances by departmental personnel, public area bulletin boards, social media (e.g., Twitter; Facebook; etc.), and others.

## **XVI. CANCELLATIONS**

- A. This procedure amends and supersedes the following standard operating procedure:

*G2: Public Information & Media Relations*, dated May 28, 2013.

- B. This procedure cancels and supersedes the following general Orders:

*14-001: Public Information & Media Relations*, dated February 8, 2014.