



## POLICE MEDIA RELATIONS / PUBLIC INFORMATION

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<i>C.A.L.E.A.</i> <b>54.1.1, 51.1.2</b>	<i>Reference</i>

### **INDEX AS:**

#### **I. PURPOSE**

It is the purpose of this policy to establish guidelines for release and dissemination of public information to print and broadcast media.

#### **II. POLICY**

It is the policy of the Iowa City Police Department to cooperate fully and impartially with authorized news media representatives in their efforts to gather factual, public information pertaining to activities of the department, as long as such information gathering does not unduly interfere with departmental operations, ongoing investigations, infringe upon individual rights or violate the law.

### III. DEFINITIONS

**Public Information:** Information that may be of interest to the general public regarding policy, procedures or events involving the department or other newsworthy information that is not legally protected, does not unduly interfere with the mission of the department, ongoing investigations, infringe upon the rights of an individual or compromise the legitimate safety and/or privacy interests of officers, victims, witnesses or others.

**News Media Representatives:** Those individuals who are directly employed by agencies of the electronic or print media such as radio, television and newspapers. Freelance workers in this field are to be regarded as other members of the general public unless otherwise designated by the Chief of Police or his/her designee.

**Public Information Officer (PIO):** The department's PIO serves as a central source of information for release by the department and responds to requests for information by the news media and the community.

### IV. PROCEDURES

#### A. Duties of the Public Information Officer

The department's PIO is available to:

- i) Be present at the scene of major incidents;
  - (1) at the scene of major incidents the officer in charge may designate an area for media to respond and a response route. The PIO will respond to this area and provide information and updates to the media as available.
- ii) assist the news media;
- iii) prepare and distribute media releases;
  - (1) when the PIO is unavailable, media releases will be provided by the on-duty watch commander or supervisor of the unit in charge of the incident. All media releases will identify the person issuing the release.
- iv) arrange for, and assist at, news conferences;
- v) coordinate and authorize the release of information about victims, witnesses and suspects;
- vi) assist in crisis situations within the agency and coordinate the release of authorized information concerning confidential agency investigations and operations.
- vii) The Public Information Officer will provide a single authoritative source for media contacts between 08:00 and 16:00 Monday through Friday.
  - (1) When the PIO is not on-duty, the Watch Commander will handle media requests. In the event of an incident generating significant numbers of media inquiries, the Watch Commander will determine the need for the PIO to respond.
  - (2) Questions regarding an investigation being handled by the investigative section will be handled by the Investigative Supervisor in the absence of the PIO. In instances where the

Investigative Supervisor is unavailable, the request will be handled by the on-duty watch supervisor.

- (3) In the event of a prolonged SRT deployment, the SRT commander may request that the PIO respond to a designated location or he/she will designate a person to serve as liaison with the media. The SRT commander may also designate routes by which members of the media should approach the area.

b) Cooperation with the Media

- i) Authorized news media representatives shall have reasonable access to the PIO, the Chief of Police or his/her designee and Command Staff of the department as governed by this policy. When information is denied to a media representative, the basis for that denial shall be fully and courteously explained.
  - ii) This department recognizes authorized identification from all local, national and international news organizations. Failure of media personnel to present authorized identification may provide grounds for restricting access to non-public information or to incident scenes.
  - iii) Public information shall be released to the news media and public as promptly as circumstances allow, in as objective a manner as possible.
  - iv) Public information may be provided to news media representatives and the public by telephone.
  - v) Ranking officers at crime or incident scenes may release information of a factual nature to the media as governed by this policy or refer the inquiry to the PIO. Where the officer is unsure of the facts or the propriety of releasing information, he/she shall refer the inquiry to the watch commander or PIO.
  - vi) When an operation involves multiple agencies the agency with primary jurisdiction will make determinations regarding appropriate media releases. The Iowa City Police Department will provide information consistent with this policy when it is the agency with primary jurisdiction. The information should include the identification of assisting agencies.
  - vii) Station Masters shall inform the watch commander as soon as possible upon receipt of information about events or activities that may be of media interest.
  - viii) The Watch Commander shall be responsible for ensuring that the agency's PIO, Commander of Field Operations and Chief of Police are informed of events that may be of media interest.
  - ix) Members of the Iowa City Police Department will be consistent in releasing information to the media for public dissemination. A decision to not release normally provided information shall not be solely based on the personal prominence of those involved. Conversely, information that is not routinely distributed shall not be put forth solely as a result of the personal prominence of an involved party.
- c) Non-investigative contact with the media is allowed and encouraged. Officers may provide information of a general nature which is not specific to an on-going investigation.

## d) Investigative Information

From the initial stage of a criminal investigation until the completion of trial or disposition without trial, police personnel should refer requests for information to the Public Information Officer or his/her designee. Upon receipt of the request for information the following guidelines shall be adhered to:

Information that may be released in connection with an investigation of an event or crime includes but is not limited to;

- (1) the type or nature of an event or crime;
- (2) the location, date and time, injuries sustained, damages, and a general description of how the incident occurred;
- (3) type of property taken;
- (4) information about the victim of a crime however it is the practice of the Iowa City Police Department to not identify victims by name;
- (5) requests for aid in locating evidence, a complainant or a suspect;
- (6) numbers of officers or people involved in an event or investigation, and the length of the investigation; and
- (7) name of the officer in charge of a case, their supervisor and assignment. (exception: the name of any undercover officer will not be released).
- (8) In instances where the disclosure of the above information may jeopardize an investigation, pose a danger to any person, or is reasonably likely to result in further victimization, the information will not be released

ii) Information that may not be released in connection with an INVESTIGATION of an event or crime, unless authorized by the Chief of Police or his/her designee includes but is not limited to;

- (1) the identity of a suspect prior to arrest unless such information would aid in apprehending the suspect or serve to warn the public of potential danger;
- (2) the identity of any victim of a crime or any related information which, if divulged, could lead to the identification of victims or witnesses, if such disclosure would jeopardize an investigation to any significant degree, or if it would place any person in personal danger;
- (3) the identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to notification of the next of kin; if a next of kin is not reasonably able to be located, the supervisor of the section conducting the investigation shall determine the method of release of this information;
- (4) the results of any investigative procedure such as lineups, polygraph tests, fingerprint comparison, ballistics test or other procedures (the fact that these tests have been performed may be revealed without further comment);
- (5) information which, if prematurely released may jeopardize the investigation or interfere with apprehension such as; the nature

of leads, specifics of an "MO", details of the crime known only to the perpetrator and the police, or information that may cause the suspect to flee or more effectively avoid apprehension;

- (6) information that may be of evidentiary value in criminal proceedings;
- (7) specific cause of death unless officially determined by the medical examiner; and
- (8) the home address or telephone number of any member of the department.

iii) Arrest Information

- (1) Following arrest, issuance of an arrest warrant or filing of an information or indictment, it is permissible to release
  - (a) the accused's name, age, residence, occupation and family status;
  - (b) the time and place of arrest, whether pursuit or resistance was encountered, whether weapons were used, charges placed against the suspect and description of contraband seized;
  - (c) the identity of the arresting officers and the duration of the investigation unless the officers are engaged in undercover operations; and
  - (d) the amount of bond, scheduled court dates and place of the suspect's detention.
  - (e) a press release shall include the language: A criminal charge is merely an accusation and the defendant is presumed innocent unless proven guilty
- (2) Following arrest and formal charging of a suspect, but prior to adjudication, the following types of information should not be released without the express permission of the Chief of Police or his/her designee.
  - (a) Character or reputation of a defendant
  - (b) Existence or contents of any confession, admission or statement of a defendant, or his/her failure or unwillingness to make a statement (this does not preclude the release of information that is in the public domain)
  - (c) Performance or results of any tests, or a defendant's refusal or failure to submit to tests. (I.e. polygraph or voice stress analyzer)
  - (d) Identity, statement or expected testimony of any witness
  - (e) Any opinion about the guilt or innocence of a defendant or the merits of the case
  - (f) Any opinion or knowledge of potential for a plea bargain or other pretrial action.

e) Special Considerations - Criminal Matters

- i) Whether a crime scene or scene of another nature, police have an obligation to preserve the integrity of a scene to gather evidence and

for other needed police activities. Therefore, police personnel will delineate the specific scene area and prevent all persons from entering that area for such length of time as there is a need to do so. It may be necessary for scene preservation purposes, and to control general access to the area, to exclude the general public from not only the scene itself, but from a reasonable area around the scene. However, officers must recognize the need for news media representatives to fulfill their obligation to view the immediate scene area for news gathering or photographing purposes. The media representatives will be accommodated, so far as conditions and circumstances permit, to go as near as practicable to the scene itself. News representatives are not to be considered the same as the general public in the area of a scene but rather as persons to be accommodated so that they may fulfill their task.

- ii) The news media shall not be allowed access to any area or scene of an incident or crime where there is possibility that evidence may be damaged, altered, destroyed or otherwise prejudiced by its existence being published or portrayed. Once evidence has been processed, removed or otherwise secured by the department, the media may be allowed to enter by permission of the commanding officer at the scene.
  - (1) If a police related incident is within a private building, police personnel will secure and protect that part of the building as may be necessary to protect the scene. Under such circumstances all persons may be excluded from the scene until processing is accomplished. If a request is made by a news media representative to enter a building or part thereof, and such entry is not precluded because of police related purposes, the news representative must obtain permission from the owner or other person in charge of the building or dwelling; if permission is not given and so stated in the presence of police personnel, officers have an obligation to ensure that the denial is honored.
  - (2) Suspects or accused persons in custody shall not be posed or arrangements made for photographs, telecasts or interviews, nor shall departmental personnel pose with suspects or accused persons in custody
  - (3) When an individual is charged with a criminal offense and/or is sought by law enforcement authorities, photographs or mug shots may be released to the media to help locate the individual. No departmental photographs, mug shots, videotape, film or composites of subjects in custody shall otherwise be released to the media unless authorized by the Chief of Police or his/her designee.
- iii) Departmental personnel shall extend every reasonable courtesy to news media representatives at crime or incident scenes. Members of the Iowa City Police Department shall not engage in "off the record" comments.

- iv) At the scene of major crimes or incidents, such as hostage and barricade situations, the officer in charge shall designate a preliminary press area as early as reasonably possible and as close to the scene as safety and operational requirements allow.
- v) The fact that a suspected suicide has occurred may be reported to the media, along with factual information describing how it happened. The name, age, address, sex and occupation of the victim may also be released following notification of next of kin. The fact that a suicide note exists may also be acknowledged without further comment. The content of such notes is personal and confidential and shall not be released by the Iowa City Police Department.
- f) Special Considerations - Non-criminal Matters
  - i) At the scene of significant accidents, man-made or natural catastrophes, the principles of media cooperation shall be maintained to the degree that they do not interfere with the mission of the police, fire, medical or other emergency relief workers.
  - g) At fire related incidents, the decision to allow properly identified news media representatives to pass beyond fire lines or to restrict them from a fire area, will be the responsibility of the on-scene fire commander.
  - h) Sensitive information relating to internal investigation of police officers shall not be released without the express permission of the Chief of Police or his/her designee.
  - i) Daily activity reports will be made available on a routine basis to media representatives. Statistical data may also be made available to the media.

Media representatives are expected to abide the Code of Ethics published by the Society of Professional Journalists. In the event of a conflict between a member of the Iowa City Police Department and the media, the parties involved are encouraged to bring the concern to the PIO or his/her designee for resolution.

- a) If a media representative wishes to speak with an individual officer the request should be routed through the PIO or when unavailable the watch supervisor. The watch supervisor will make the determination as to the availability of the officer; however, to the extent possible these requests should be made in advance. Officers are expected to cooperate with media representatives to the extent of this policy.
- b) All media questions relating to the policies of the Iowa City Police Department should be directed to the Chief of Police or his/her designee. If questions arise when the Chief or his/her designee is not available, notification of the request shall be forwarded to the watch supervisor.

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Jody Matherly, Chief of Police

**WARNING**

This directive is for departmental use only and does not apply in any criminal or civil proceeding. The department policy should not be construed as a creation of a higher legal standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense with respect to third-party claims. Violations of this directive will only form the basis for departmental administrative sanctions.