


PINE BLUFF POLICE DEPARTMENT POLICY & PROCEDURES MANUAL

	SUBJECT:	POLICY NUMBER 610
	POLICE MEDIA RELATIONS	ISSUE DATE 02/19/2008
	CHAPTER: COMMUNITY RELATIONS	EFFECTIVE DATE 02/19/2008
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I. PURPOSE

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

II. POLICY

No employee shall release any information that would jeopardize an active investigation, prejudice an accused person's right to a fair trial, or violate the law. It shall be the policy of this agency to cooperate with the news media and to maintain an atmosphere of open communication. A positive working relationship with the media is mutually beneficial. To this end, information shall be released to the news media in an impartial, accurate and timely fashion. It shall be the responsibility of each employee to abide by this philosophy of cooperation.

III. RESPONSIBILITIES IN RELEASING INFORMATION

A. It is ultimately the responsibility of the agency chief executive (CEO) to release information to the public. That responsibility may be delegated to the following personnel:

1. Public Information Officer (PIO) or PIO Designee
2. The PIO is the primary contact for the news media.

B. SUPERVISORS

Supervisors with responsibility for a specific case or incident may be the secondary contact for the news media in the absence of the PIO.

C. OTHER EMPLOYEES

The agency head, PIO, or members of the Senior Command Staff may direct other employees to respond to media inquiries in the absence of the PIO.

IV. ORGANIZATION OF PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE OR FUNCTION

A. The PIO function shall support the agency and its personnel in matters involving the news media. To accomplish this, the PIO shall be available during normal business hours and be on call for emergencies and critical incidents at all other times.

B. The shift commander shall be responsible for ensuring that the PIO is informed of major incidents and all other events that may generate media interest.

C. DUTIES OF THE PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

1. Assist news personnel in covering routine news stories, and at the scenes of incidents;
2. Assist the news media on an on-call basis;
3. Prepare and distribute news releases;
4. Coordinate and authorize the release of information about victims, witnesses and suspects;
5. Coordinate the release of authorized information concerning confidential agency investigations and operations.

V. PROCEDURES

A. MEDIA INQUIRIES

1. The agency shall respond to all media inquiries in a timely and professional manner. During normal business hours, media inquiries shall be directed to the PIO.
2. Authorized news media representatives shall have reasonable access to the Chief of Police and operations of this department as governed by this policy.
3. Public information may be provided to media representatives by telephone if the identity of the representative is known or can be authenticated.

4. Ranking officers at minor crime or incident scenes may release information of a factual nature to the media as governed by the policy or refer the inquiry to the public information officer. Where the officer is unsure of the facts or the propriety of releasing information, he/she shall refer the inquiry to the public information officer.
5. The release of information on major crimes and incidents will originate out of the public information office.
6. Written press statements and the release of video or digital recordings of crimes in progress or for suspect(s) identification shall be released only following approval of the public information officer.

D. INTERVIEWS

The PIO shall be responsible for assisting the news media by conducting interviews him or herself or coordinating interviews with other qualified agency personnel. Employees contacted directly by the media shall notify the PIO of any interview requests. All conversations with members of the news media should be considered "on the record" and subject to being quoted.

E. NEWS RELEASES

News releases shall be written and disseminated to the media and to agency employees on major incidents and events of community interest or concern. The agency shall establish a procedure for review and approval of news releases in advance of dissemination.

F. NEWS CONFERENCES

News conferences shall be held only in connection with major events of concern to the community. The agency CEO shall be informed of all news conferences. The PIO shall facilitate the news conference, which may include the agency CEO or designee.

G. ACCESS TO CRIME SCENES AND CRITICAL INCIDENTS

1. Agency personnel shall be courteous to news media representatives at crime and critical incident scenes.
2. At such scenes, agency personnel shall ensure that the media respect the established perimeter. Members of the media shall receive no more or less access to an incident scene than members of the general public.
3. The news media shall not be allowed access to any area or scene of an incident or crime where there is a possibility that evidence may be damaged, altered, destroyed or otherwise prejudiced by its existence being published or portrayed.

4. Once evidence has been processed, removed and secured by the department, the media may be allowed to enter by permission of the senior officer at the scene.
5. On private property, photography, film or videotaping by the media requires the permission of the owner or the owner's representative.
6. Suspects or accused persons in custody shall not be posed or arrangements made for photographs, telecasts or interviews, nor shall department personnel pose with suspects or accused persons in custody.
7. When an individual is charged with a criminal offense and 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, file or composites of subjects in custody shall be released unless authorized by the Public Information Officer and Commander of Detective Division.
8. The PIO, with approval of the scene commander, may grant closer access to news personnel and their equipment, to the degree that it does not interfere with law enforcement operations.
9. No member of this agency shall prohibit the media from newsgathering practices, including photography and interviews, outside the established perimeter.
10. News media representatives shall not be prevented from access to any area solely because of the possibility of their injury or death. If this is the only consideration, the scene commander shall advise the media representative of the danger and allow the media representative to make the decision to enter on his or her volition.
11. Only the PIO or scene commander shall release information to the news media at crime and critical incident scenes.
12. At critical incident scenes, the PIO or scene commander shall establish a media briefing area as close to the scene as safety and operational requirements allow.
13. At critical incident scenes, members of the agency shall work in close cooperation with the media to ensure that live broadcasts do not disclose any information that could endanger law enforcement personnel or the general public.

H. PUBLIC RECORDS

This agency and its members shall abide by all local, state, and federal laws governing the release of public records.

I. ACCESS TO SUSPECTS

No member of this agency shall pose any suspect or accused person in custody or make him or her available for media interviews.

J. JOINT INVESTIGATIONS OR OPERATIONS INVOLVING ANOTHER AGENCY

In a multijurisdictional investigation, the lead investigative agency is responsible for providing or coordinating the release of public information. The PIO or designee for the lead agency shall share that information with all involved agencies in advance of public dissemination.

VI. INFORMATION RELEASE GUIDELINES

A. The release of information is subject to restrictions placed by applicable local, state, and federal laws. No member of this agency shall release any information that would hamper the successful conclusion of an investigation or jeopardize the safety of affected persons.

1. Agency members can release the following information:

- a. Basic information about a crime or incident
- b. Basic information about victims, except as excluded by law
- c. Description of suspects
- d. Basic description of weapons and vehicles used
- e. Basic description of stolen items
- f. Basic description of injuries and condition of victims
- g. The name, age, address, and other basic information about arrestees and the charges against them
- h. Information contained in arrest affidavits and other applicable crime or incident reports
- i. Booking photographs

B. AGENCY MEMBERS SHALL NOT RELEASE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION

- 1. Names, addresses, and any other information that would identify the victim of a sex offense, child abuse, or any other crime where the privacy of the victim is protected by law.
- 2. Names, addresses, and basic information about juvenile arrestees, as governed by Arkansas state law.
- 3. Active criminal investigative information, active criminal intelligence information, and surveillance techniques
- 4. Names of informants and information provided by them
- 5. Supplemental or investigative reports until such time as the case is closed or the lead investigator deems it permissible
- 6. Grand jury testimony and proceedings
- 7. Active internal affairs investigations, as governed by state law

8. Names of witnesses, unless required by state law
9. The identity of critically injured or deceased persons prior to notification of next-of-kin
10. Home address, telephone numbers, and familial information of law enforcement personnel
11. Names of undercover personnel
12. Any other information that could jeopardize the successful conclusion of an investigative and prosecution
13. Any other information prohibited by state law from public disclosure

C. MEDIA RIDE-ALONGS

Media ride-alongs allow members of the media to accompany law enforcement officers as they perform their duties. This program is available utilizing the Department's ride-along program. Employees shall not permit members of the media to accompany them onto private property nor shall they assist in securing permission for access from property owners.

D. TRAINING

This agency is committed to providing proper training for its public information officer. Supervisors, line officers, and other personnel who interact with the media shall also be provided access to appropriate training.

E. ETHICS

It is the policy of this agency to treat members of the media professionally and ethically. It is expected that the media will respond in a like manner and follow ethical guidelines established by their profession. Members of the agency who believe they were treated unethically should contact the PIO.

F. MEETINGS WITH THE MEDIA

Reaffirming this agency's commitment to positive media relations, and as coordination can be accomplished, the agency CEO and PIO shall meet with media representatives to discuss issues of mutual interest or concern. Proposed or anticipated changes in department policy or procedures dealing with the media also shall be addressed at this time

G. PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

1. Associations with Other Public Information Officers.
 - a. This agency is committed to ensuring the PIO function is part of mutual aid support that law enforcement agencies provide to each other. To that end, the PIO shall participate in and support professional associations and organizations composed of PIOs from other public and private agencies.
2. Law Enforcement-Media Associations This agency shall participate in regional law enforcement-media associations to improve understanding between the two professions.

K. LIVE COVERAGE AGREEMENTS

Live coverage agreements establish voluntary guidelines for the broadcast of live pictures or information emanating from critical incident scenes such as hostage situations, barricaded subjects, and similar ongoing crises. This agency supports the creation, implementation, and use of such agreements.

L. MEDIA CREDENTIALS

This agency acknowledges representatives from recognized media organizations who carry and display photographic identification issued by their employer. Anyone else shall be considered a member of the general public.

M. ALTERNATIVE METHODS TO DISSEMINATE INFORMATION

It is the policy of this agency to pursue alternative methods of disseminating information directly to the public. These may include community newsletters, government access cable television shows, Web sites, public appearances by agency members, public area bulletin boards, and other means.

N. SPECIAL CONSIDERATION-NON CRIMINAL MATTERS

1. News media representatives should not be prevented from access to any area solely because of the possibility of their injury or death. If this is the only consideration, the media representative should be advised of the danger and allowed to make the decision to enter on his own volition.
2. Daily reports of criminal activity will be made available on a routine basis to media representatives.