

**TITLE: POLICE MEDIA RELATIONS**

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**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this directive is to establish guidelines and define responsibilities for the release of information to the news media.

**DISCUSSION**

In order to provide and disseminate information to the community and the news media, the Santa Fe Police Department must establish and maintain media relations' procedures. These procedures should provide for the timely and effective distribution of information, which bolsters community support, provides for the rights of the public to be informed, yet safeguards against the release of information which could impede ongoing investigations or damage the integrity and rights afforded to victims.

**POLICY**

It is the policy of the Santa Fe Police Department to support the fundamental principles of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, as it pertains to the rights of the news media and the public. The police department is committed to, and recognizes the right of the public and news media to be fully and accurately informed on matters concerning public safety. All members of this department will strive to maintain a relationship of trust, cooperation, mutual respect and free flow of information with the public and news media without partiality.

**PROCEDURE**

**77.1.01** The Administrative Deputy Chief or his/her designee shall handle the Police Media Relations and function as the Public Information Officer.

**77.1.02** The Public Information Officer (PIO) will be available 24 hours a day to handle liaison duties between the media and the Department. Regular working hours will be 0800 to 1700 hours. After regular hours, weekends, or holidays the PIO may be contacted by the media via the PIO's pager, or the Regional Communications Center.

**77.1.03** Public information shall be released as promptly as circumstances allow in an impartial, courteous and objective manner. The Supervisor or, the Officer in charge, shall prepare and forward newsworthy events to the PIO in a timely fashion. The PIO shall be responsible for releasing press releases.

**NOTE:** If the PIO is unavailable, notice will be provided to staff and to the media regarding the designated PIO and appropriate contact numbers for the designee. This person shall assume the responsibility of releasing the information, or shall designate the person who will disseminate this information. The PIO shall be notified as soon as possible as to the content of information that was released.

**77.1.03** The PIO shall be notified on the following:

- A. Any major incident likely to attract news media attention shall be brought to the attention of the PIO by the ranking on-duty Commander.
- B. Accidents involving police vehicles, or injury to Department personnel.
- C. Vehicle accidents involving fatalities, or serious injury or major property damage that may prompt an inquiry by the media.
- D. Homicides, accidental deaths or malicious wounding with serious injury.
- E. Police shootings.

- F. Tactical situations (i.e., hostage, barricade situations).
- G. Incidents involving persons whom, by their position in society, are of interest to the public.
- H. Felonies such as business robberies, kidnapping, or verified abduction.
- I. Natural or man-made disasters resulting in Loss of life and/or extensive property damage.
- J. Demonstrations, strikes or civil disorders, regardless of damage.
- K. Missing persons, when intensive search is required, or when there are indications that a crime has been committed.
- L. Suicides when committed in a public place or manner as to attract attention.

**77.1.04** The PIO shall also be notified of any incident or event that the on-duty commander deems necessary, or upon the arrival of news media to an incident. The commander shall use discretion in making notification based on the significance of each incident. Notification can be made in person, by phone (after hours), or by a copy of the incident report prior to the end of the shift.

**77.1.05** Department personnel are responsible for ensuring that the PIO is advised of all interesting or newsworthy events occurring within their purview.

**NOTE:** Any time a Department employee is approached by the media concerning a major incident involving the Department, or an incident being investigated by the Department, he/she shall notify the on-duty commander who will notify the PIO as soon as possible, so that the PIO Office can be prepared for any follow-up inquiries by the media.

**77.1.06** The release of information on incidents involving other city, state or federal agencies will be conducted by the agency having primary jurisdiction.

**RELEASE OF INFORMATION TO MEDIA BY  
POLICE PERSONNEL**

**77.1.07** The PIO shall be responsible for the release of routine news information after 1700 hours, Monday-Friday, and on weekends and holidays.

**77.1.08** There may be times when officers are approached about an incident by the media. The officer will advise the on-duty commander, who will relay the following known information to the PIO:

- A. Known facts and circumstances relating to the crime that will not hinder or prejudice the investigation (e.g., the time and place of arrest, any resistance encountered, and pursuit).
- B. A general description of the suspects, if known, or evidence seized. A suspect may **NOT** be identified by name until he has been formally charged with the commission of a crime or a warrant has been served. Exceptions for earlier release shall be at the discretion of the PIO, after consultation with the investigating supervisor.
- C. The nature, substance or text of the charges brought against a subject, including a brief description of the offense, and an announcement of the scheduling or result of any stage in the judicial process.
- D. The identity of the investigating and/or arresting officer, providing such information does not jeopardize or compromise personnel assigned to undercover operations.
- E. The name and general address of the victim, except:
  1. In death investigations, when next-of-kin has not been notified.
  2. In any situation where safety/security of the victim is in question.

**NOTE:** Addresses will be given by block number (e.g.: 2500 block of Camino Entrada, 2800 block of Cerrillos Road)

- F. The identity of the victim **AFTER** next of kin has been notified and the ranking investigating officer has approved release of name. If notification cannot be given within a reasonable time, the reason will be determined and the news media advised of the circumstances.

**NOTE:** Supervisors wishing to restrict the release of victim information listed under **77.1.08B**, must notify the PIO with the compelling reasons for not releasing the information. The PIO will then advise the Chief of Police, who will make a final decision concerning release of the information.

**77.1.09** The media shall not have access to the following information:

- A. A detailed description of suspects or evidence that could hinder or prejudice the investigation.
- B. Prior criminal record of accused if NOT formally charged with prior crimes.
- C. The character or reputation of the accused. (If the accused has not been apprehended, an officer associated with the investigation may release any information necessary to aid in the apprehension of the accused or advise the public of potential danger.)
- D. The existence or contents of any confession, admission, or statement given by the accused or information about the presence or absence of any examination or tests conducted in the course of an investigation.
- E. Personal opinions about the suspect, his guilt or innocence, mental status, anticipated plea, or value of evidence against the accused.
- F. The identity, testimony or credibility of confidential witnesses.
- G. Suspects who are interviewed but not charged shall not be identified.
- H. Present location of any victims of sexual offenses.
- I. Home address or telephone number of any Santa Fe Police Department employee.
- J. The contents of a suicide note or electronically recorded message.
- K. The amount of money taken in any robbery except for a general description i.e. undisclosed amount.
- L. Specific cause of death until announced by the State Medical Examiner or his/her deputy.

### CRIME SCENES

**77.1.10** Media representatives may be given guided access to crime scenes when it is determined practical by the ranking investigating officer, except in the following instances:

- A. When the crime scene is on private property.
- B. When the presence of news media representatives might adversely affect the preservation of evidence at the scene or interfere with the investigation.

**77.1.11** Crime scenes will be secured by Department personnel and media access will not be permitted within the outer limits unless authorized by the ranking investigating officer. News media coverage will be permitted adjacent to any barriers. Major scenes may require two perimeters, one for the general public and a second for assembly personnel and media representatives. Media representatives may be allowed access to the inner perimeter provided access does not contaminate the scene, endanger life and conflict with sound police procedures. The scene commander and PIO will be responsible for this decision.

**77.1.12** A newsperson may be permitted in the area of a crime scene or serious police incident, but he does not have the authority to be within a crime scene or area that has been secured to preserve evidence or at any location where his presence jeopardizes police operations.

**77.1.13** The media representatives should be assisted in gaining access to the scene as soon as possible provided it will not interfere with the investigation.

**77.1.14** The media will be advised against access to a scene for legitimate safety reasons.

**77.1.15** The media is responsible for obtaining any permission necessary for access to a scene.

**77.1.16** News media representatives will be provided information about the crime at all crime scenes either by the PIO or the ranking investigating officer (or designee).

### INTERVIEWS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

**77.1.17** Photographs or videotape may be taken from any area where the news media representatives have been given access. Officers may restrict the use of flash, strobe, or high intensity lights when the use of such equipment would hinder a police operation, endanger officers or citizens by exposing them to unnecessary risks, or create a hazard (for example, may cause an explosion in a gaseous atmosphere).

**77.1.18** Members of the department will not prevent the photographing of defendants when they are in public places outside the courtroom. They will neither encourage nor discourage pictures and must not pose with the accused.

**NOTE:** Department photographs of a suspect may be released provided the photograph will not jeopardize an investigation AND if a valid law enforcement function is served. It is proper to disclose this type of information to enlist public assistance in apprehending fugitives from justice. Such disclosure may include photographs as well as other information if not prohibited by policy or law.

**77.1.19** Areas of access for news media representatives within confines of the Santa Fe Police Department facility will include:

- A. Any areas open to the public.
- B. Any designated area set aside for news media briefings.

C. Any area to which the news media representatives are provided guided access by a member of this department.

**NOTE:** No photographs of suspects or witnesses will be permitted in any areas of the Department.

D. News media representatives shall be permitted to interview victims of a crime or disasters, who have consented to such interviews provided:

1. The victim appears able to make sound decisions, is not visibly upset, severely injured or emotionally distraught.
2. Investigative personnel have completed their interviews.
3. If victims desire not to be interviewed, the news media representatives will be so advised.

### RELEASING SENSITIVE INFORMATION

**77.1.20** Items of evidence should not be made public, which if disclosed, would be prejudicial to the solution of the case. Photographs may be furnished of a person accused by indictment or warrant, without police identification on them. Where the identity of a suspect has not been established, it may be desirable to publicize descriptions, artists' sketches, or other information that could lead to the identification and arrest of the suspect.

**77.1.21** Suspects who are interviewed, but not charged, should not be identified.

**77.1.22** The finding of physical evidence, such as weapons or proceeds of the crime, the issuance and service of a search warrant, and the positive or negative results of a search, may be released provided the search was not carried out under authority of a federal search warrant which has, or may be, subject to a federal gag order. Information as to how a weapon or evidence of the crime was located should be withheld if this involved information that is prejudicial or confidential.

**77.1.23** Fugitive cases may require wide publicity. The circumstances and facts in each case will be the controlling factors in decisions. In some fugitive cases it may be necessary to withhold information when its publication would be detrimental to the apprehension of the wanted person. Common sense should dictate the manner in which fugitive cases are handled with a positive view toward the public interest and safety protection of other law enforcement agencies.

**77.1.24** References to cases being tried in court will be directed to the District Attorney. Members of the police department, including the PIO, will not comment on any case being tried. The only exception to this shall be by or at the direction of the Chief of Police.

**GUIDELINES FOR NEWS MEDIA  
REPRESENTATIVES ARRIVING AT  
THE SCENE**

**77.1.25** News media representatives shall have the proper identification (credentials) before being allowed access. If the news media representative does not have the proper identification, the officer in charge or the PIO may permit access.

**77.1.26** When mobile television or radio transmitting units arrive at the scene, operators shall be directed to go on foot to the PIO or on scene commander to receive assistance in determining the most strategic location to place the vehicles. Department personnel will provide assistance to advance such mobile units to that location.

**77.1.27** Situation briefings will be provided at the media command post on a timely basis. The PIO or ranking officer in charge will conduct such briefings.

**77.1.28** Request for information regarding any investigation not released at the scene should be directed to the PIO for follow-up.

**77.1.29** For daily news releases, news media representatives should contact the PIO during regular working hours, or access the hot sheet folder, which is available 24 hours per day.

**77.1.30** All day-to-day requests for information, interviews with department personnel (including the Chief of Police) shall be scheduled through the PIO during normal working hours.

**REQUESTING WITHHOLDING OF  
PUBLICATION**

**77.1.31** Newspersons may photograph or report anything they observed when legally present at an emergency scene. Where publication of such coverage would interfere with an official investigation or place a victim, suspect or others in jeopardy, the withholding of publication is dependent upon a cooperative press, not upon censorship by the Department. Upon such circumstances, officers should advise the PIO of the possible consequences of publication; however, officers may not interfere with news persons' activities as long as that performance remains within the confines of the law.

**PRESS CONFERENCES**

**77.1.32** A press conference may be conducted with the consent of the Chief of Police.

**77.1.33** In most cases, the Chief of Police, a Division Commander or the Officer in charge of the case, and any other knowledgeable Officers will be present to provide additional background information.

**77.1.34** Police Department representatives should be appropriately attired and respond to inquiries courteously.

**77.1.35** The PIO should not respond to improper questions or adversarial situations. When required, the PIO should address inappropriate situations with the media representatives' direct supervisor.

**77.1.36** Media representatives will be supplied with appropriate packets. Packets may include, but are not confined to:

- When appropriate, a general press release detailing the incident, with correctly-spelled names, dates of birth and addresses of suspects.

- Applicable statistics.
- Photographs of suspects, news clippings and other visual objects that will meet the special needs of television crews.

77.1.37 In instances where the Police Department is engaged in an activity with another agency(e.g., another law enforcement agency, fire department, Medical Examiners Office), the agency having primary jurisdiction shall be responsible for releasing or coordinating the release of information.

**MEDIA INPUT INTO PUBLIC INFORMATION POLICIES**

77.1.38 When changes are made to policies and procedures relating to the news media, representatives of the various media will be encouraged to participate in the development of the policy and procedure.

Drafted (awm) 10/02

APPROVED:   
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Chief of Police

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