


POLICY 108	MEDIA RELATIONS	
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A. POLICY STATEMENT

The Fort Lauderdale Police Department has established guidelines for the release and dissemination of agency information to the news media. It is the policy of this agency that information be released in a factual and professional manner and in a way as not to jeopardize the integrity of an official investigation or infringe upon the rights of the individual. All information shall be released in accordance with Florida Public Records Law, FSS 119; Florida Public Officers and Employees Law, FSS 112; and within the guidelines of established procedures.

B. PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

The Chief of Police will appoint Public Information Officers to coordinate the affairs of the Media Relations Unit. The Public Information Officers (PIO) will act as a liaison between the Department and the mass news media to ensure that information regarding Department matters is properly disseminated.

Public Information Officers are responsible for:

1. Assisting members of the news media in covering routine news stories regarding police matters;
2. Responding to police scenes, which are of public concern, in order to gather pertinent information which will be released to news bureaus in a factual and timely manner;
3. Maintaining an "on-call" status in order to respond to police scenes which are of significant interest to the public, and to assist police and media personnel in gathering pertinent information for public release;
4. Preparing written news releases related to police incidents and agency activities that are of public interest, and to distribute those releases to the mass news media;
5. Arranging and coordinating department news conferences;
6. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information regarding victims, witnesses, suspects, arrestees and agency personnel to the news media in accordance with F.S.S. 112 and F.S.S. 119;
7. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential investigations and operations under the guidance of the Investigative Bureau

Assistant Chief and/or the Major of Internal Affairs, in accordance with Florida State Statutes 112 and 119;

8. Being familiar with all agency activities, functions, operations and programs;
9. Releasing agency information under the authority and direction of the Chief of Police.

C. PERSONS AUTHORIZED TO RELEASE INFORMATION

Public Information Officers and Police Managers are authorized to release agency information to the news media under the authority and direction of the Chief of Police and within the guidelines of this policy.

1. The PIO may refer specific media inquiries to the appropriate Police Manager.
2. Shift Lieutenants are responsible for releasing information to the media whenever the PIO is not available.
3. An Investigations Bureau Captain or designee shall review and approve the release of any information concerning an active investigation, within their respective division, prior to publication.
4. When assigned to an active police scene, police personnel shall refer all news media inquiries to the PIO, Shift Lieutenant or Duty Lieutenant.
5. The Public Records Coordinator is authorized to release information from department files on cases which are closed and are deemed to be a matter of public record.

D. PRESS RELEASES

1. A press release shall be completed on all police incidents which are of significant interest to the public, the mass news media or when deemed appropriate by the Chief of Police, the Public Information Officer or a Captain and above.
2. All press releases shall be approved by the Media Relations Unit, prior to being released to the media.
3. The subject matter of the press release shall include the time, date, location and nature of an incident. Information regarding the identity of those involved in an incident shall be released within the guidelines set forth in section G of this policy.
4. The press releases shall be forwarded to all local major news bureaus as well as to the Associated Press.

E. NEWS MEDIA CREDENTIALS

The department recognizes valid forms of identification issued to media representatives by their respective local, national and international accredited news agencies. Press privileges are extended to those news bureau representatives who carry and display proper identification issued by their agencies. Any questions concerning the validity of press credentials should be referred to the PIO.

F. MEDIA ACCESS TO SECURED POLICE SCENES

1. Official police lines are established to:
 - a. Preserve the integrity of an area which is to be analyzed and processed during a criminal investigation;
 - b. Secure areas which may pose a threat to public safety and/or involve significant resources on the part of emergency services (e.g. major fires, natural disasters, or other catastrophic events).
2. The department extends certain privileges to members of the news media at secured police scenes so they may gather sufficient information regarding incidents of public interest.
3. A "Media Staging Area" may be established in order to give media personnel a working view of the secured area, as well as convenient access to the PIO, or designee, without violating the integrity of the scene or hindering police operations.
4. Officers do not have the legal authority to prevent the public or news media representatives from photographing or videotaping police operations or crime scenes from outside official police lines.
5. The commanding officer of a police scene may take precautions to cover objects within the secure area which may not be appropriate for public view.

G. RELEASE OF INFORMATION TO THE NEWS MEDIA

1. Unless prohibited in Section 2, the following information may be released:
 - a. The date, time, location and nature of a reported crime;
 - b. The name, sex, age, and address of a person charged with a crime;
 - c. The name, sex, age of the victim of a crime;
 - d. A photograph of an arrested person when cleared by the case investigator or PIO;
 - e. Department personnel may not prevent media representatives from photographing arrestees while in a public area however; arrestees shall not be paraded or posed for the media.

2. Information which may NOT be released unless cleared through a PIO:
 - a. The identity of any victim of a sexual battery, domestic violence, child abuse or neglect, stalking, aggravated battery or witness tampering or any information, which if divulged, might lead to the victim's identity, residence or place of employment;
 - b. The identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to family notification;
 - c. Specific causes of death prior to the Medical Examiner's evaluation and the approval of a Criminal Investigations Division Captain;
 - d. Any information concerning the substance of a statement given to the police by the accused (e.g. refusal of statement, confession or admission);
 - e. The result of any examination or test of the accused;
 - f. The identity of a juvenile charged with a misdemeanor who has not been adjudicated as an adult; or a juvenile's criminal history;
 - g. Unauthorized release of information which is of an evidentiary nature regarding a criminal case;
 - h. Contents of a suicide note prior to case closure;
 - i. Personal opinions, such as, opinions regarding the guilt or innocence of the accused or merits of the case;
 - j. Information concerning the identity, testimony, or credibility of a prospective witness;
 - k. Information received from, or actions taken by, other law enforcement agencies without their concurrence for the release;
 - l. The home addresses, telephone numbers, social security numbers and photographs of active or former agency personnel or their family members; nor their family member's places of employment;
 - m. Unauthorized comments concerning prior criminal record, character or reputation of an accused;
 - n. Reports, transcripts or summaries of proceedings from which the media and public were excluded by judicial order.
3. Information concerning the identity of a juvenile offender (name, photographs, and address) may be released if the child is arrested under an offense which, if committed by an adult, would be a felony; or if the child arrested has been found by a court to have committed three or more offenses which, if committed by an adult, would be misdemeanors.

H. RELEASE OF INFORMATION INVOLVING OTHER AGENCIES

1. When an investigation involves another law enforcement agency the agency having primary jurisdiction and responsibility shall coordinate the release of information.
2. The federal agency controlling a narcotic investigation shall determine the guidelines for the release of information.
3. The F.B.I. shall be the primary authority in releasing investigative information regarding federally insured financial institutions, savings and loan associations and armored car courier services.
4. Whenever the police department and fire department have shared responsibility of an incident scene, the Police PIO and Fire PIO will coordinate their efforts to ensure that information is appropriately released.
5. Whenever city administration and the police department have shared responsibility regarding incidents or situations involving city employees, the Police PIO and City Hall PAO will coordinate their efforts to ensure that administrative and investigative information is appropriately released.

I. MEDIA ACCESS TO THE DEPARTMENT

1. Representative of accredited news media agencies entering the police department will be allowed access to specific areas of need by the PIO or designated supervisor.
2. Media personnel must display proper credentials while in a secured area of the police department.
3. While in secured areas of the department, media personnel will complete their business under proper supervision and will return directly to a public area of the department.
4. Media photography within secured areas is restricted and must be authorized by the PIO or an agency captain.

J. NOTIFICATIONS

1. The Chief of Police and the Public Information Officer shall, in an expeditious manner, be notified whenever:
 - a. Incidents of a sensitive nature which may draw public attention to an agency employee or the Department;
 - b. Incidents likely to attract significant ongoing media attention;
 - c. Incidents involving serious officer injury;

- d. Incidents involving serious injury to a suspect or citizen due to police action;
2. The commanding supervisor of an incident scene shall determine who will be notified and shall verify that the appropriate notifications were made via the communication supervisor.