
Media Relations

805.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidelines for media releases and media access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies and other law enforcement activities.

805.2 RESPONSIBILITIES

The ultimate authority and responsibility for the release of information to the media shall remain with the Chief of Police, however, in situations not warranting immediate notice to the Chief of Police and in situations where the Chief of Police has given prior approval, Lieutenants, Patrol Sergeants and designated Public Information Officer(s) may prepare and release information to the media in accordance with this policy and the applicable law.

805.2.1 MEDIA REQUEST

Any media request for information or access to a law enforcement situation shall be referred to the designated department media representative, or if unavailable, to the first available supervisor. Prior to releasing any information to the media, employees shall consider the following:

- A. At no time shall any employee of this department make any comment or release any official information to the media without prior approval from a supervisor or the designated department media representative.
- B. In situations involving multiple law enforcement agencies, every reasonable effort should be made to coordinate media releases with the authorized representative of each involved agency prior to the release of any information by this department.
- C. Under no circumstance should any member of this department make any comment(s) to the media regarding any law enforcement incident not involving this department without prior approval of the Chief of Police.

805.3 PUBLIC INFORMATION FUNCTION

A. The Commander Investigations is designated as the Public Information Officer. The primary duties of the Public Information Officer consists of assisting members of the media in gathering information about cases investigated by the Department, handling publicity of special Department programs, and serving as the general liaison with the media. Responsibilities and functions of the Public Information Officer include:

1. Serving as the central source of information about the Department and responding to various requests by members of the media (including an on-scene response when necessary).
2. Assisting media personnel in covering new stories at the scenes of incidents.
3. Preparing and distributing Department media releases in a timely fashion.
4. Facilitating and assisting at media conferences.
5. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects.
6. Assisting as media liaison during crisis situations.

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7. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential Department investigations and operations.
8. Maintaining files of press releases issued by the Department.
9. Conferring regularly with supervisory staff to keep abreast of cases that may be of interest to the media.
10. Assuming a proactive role, in contacting the media with information that might not otherwise come to their attention.

B. General Release of Information To The Media

1. Content: The Commander of Investigations or his designee shall ensure that reports are reviewed and any information that might jeopardize the integrity of the investigation is redacted prior to making them available to the media. These reports and official press releases will be maintained by the Commander of Investigations.
2. Dissemination to the media will be accomplished to ensure equal availability to all media members. Generally press releases will be sent out by group email, fax or posted on the Police Department's Facebook Page.
3. In accordance with the provisions of the Local Records Act, 50 ILCS 205/3b, when an individual is arrested, the arrest report and Officer's report must be available to the news media as soon as practicable, but in no event shall the time period exceed 72 hours from arrest.

C. Ongoing Investigations

1. Only the Chief of Police, Deputy Chief, Investigations Commander, or their designee may release information to the media concerning an on-going criminal investigation.
2. Suspects or accused persons in custody shall not be posed or made available for media interviews by any member of the department.

D. Release of Information Authority and Restrictions

1. Any release of information shall be in accordance with the Illinois Statutes and the Freedom of Information Act, Illinois Compiled Statutes 5 ILCS 140.
2. See Policy 802 Protected Information.

805.4 MEDIA ACCESS

Authorized members of the media shall be provided access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies and other law enforcement activities subject to the following conditions:

- A. The media representative shall produce valid press credentials that shall be prominently displayed at all times while in areas otherwise closed to the public.
- B. Media representatives may be prevented from interfering with emergency operations and criminal investigations.
 1. Reasonable effort should be made to provide a safe staging area for the media that is near the incident and that will not interfere with emergency or criminal investigation operations. All information released to the media should be coordinated through the department Public Information Officer or other designated spokesperson.

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2. Whenever the presence of media or other aircraft poses a threat to public or officer safety or significantly hampers incident operations, the field supervisor should consider requesting a Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR). All requests for TFR should be routed through the Patrol Sergeant. The TFR request should include specific information regarding the perimeter and altitude necessary for the incident and should be requested through the appropriate control tower. If the control tower is not known, the Federal Aviation Administration should be contacted (14 CFR 91.137).
- C. No member of this department who is under investigation shall be subjected to media visits or interviews without the consent of the involved employee.
- D. Media interviews with individuals who are in custody shall not be permitted without the approval of the Chief of Police and the express consent of the person in custody.

A tactical operation should be handled in the same manner as a crime scene, except the news media should be permitted within the outer perimeter of the scene, subject to any restrictions as determined by the supervisor in charge. Department members shall not jeopardize a tactical operation in order to accommodate the news media. All comments to the media shall be coordinated through a supervisor or the Public Information Officer.

805.4.1 PROVIDING ADVANCE INFORMATION

To protect the safety and rights of officers and other persons, advance information about planned actions by law enforcement personnel, such as movement of persons in custody or the execution of an arrest or search warrant, should not be disclosed to the news media, nor should media representatives be invited to be present at such actions except with the prior approval of the Chief of Police.

Any exceptions to the above should only be considered for the furtherance of legitimate law enforcement purposes. Prior to approving any exception the Chief of Police will consider, at minimum, whether the release of information or presence of the media would unreasonably endanger any individual, prejudice the rights of any person or is otherwise prohibited by law.