

WATERTOWN POLICE DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDER



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CHIEF

Effective Date: October 1, 2006	Rescinds: A-115 Amends:	Number: A-115
Subject: Media Relations		Re-evaluation Date: October 1, 2009
Distribution: ALL PERSONNEL	Related CALEA Standards:	

This order consists of the following numbered sections:

1. Purpose
2. Policy
3. Definitions
4. Procedures

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this order is to outline acceptable news media guidelines for all members of the Watertown Police Department.

2. POLICY

It is the policy of the Watertown Police Department to provide news items of public concern and maintain good working relations with the news media. Information should flow freely to the public as quickly and completely as possible, provided such information does not jeopardize active investigations, prejudice the accused's right to a fair trial or violate the law. Every member of the Watertown Police Department is free to speak to the media about agency matters so long as the basic policy set forth in this order is not violated.

3. DEFINITIONS

A. **PUBLIC RECORDS** - all documents, electronic mail, papers, letters, maps, books, tapes, photographs, films, sound recordings or other material, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received pursuant to law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business of any agency.

B. **CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIVE INFORMATION** - information relating to an identifiable person or group of persons compiled by a criminal justice agency in the course of conducting a criminal investigation of a specific act or omission, including but not limited to, information derived from laboratory tests, reports of investigators or informants, or any type of surveillance. Such information is considered "active" as long as it is related to an ongoing investigation which is continuing with a reasonable, good faith anticipation of securing an arrest or prosecution in the foreseeable future.

C. **CRIMINAL INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION** - information concerning an identifiable person or group of persons collected by a criminal justice agency in an effort to anticipate, prevent, or monitor possible criminal activity. Such information is considered "active" as long as it is related to intelligence gathering conducted with a reasonable, good faith belief that it will lead to detection of ongoing or reasonably anticipated criminal activities.

4. PROCEDURES

A. Media Relations

1. Each member of the agency will maintain a cooperative and harmonious professional relationship with representatives of the news media.
2. Patrol and investigative unit supervisors will be responsible for identifying incidents or investigations likely to be of public/news media interest and notifying the Public Information Officer so that a news release can be generated.
3. At the scene of any event of public interest, representatives of the news media will be permitted to conduct interviews, take photographs, and otherwise perform their assigned tasks provided such activity does not interfere with law enforcement operations. The senior department member at the scene will provide information and grant interviews to members of the news media or designate a

knowledgeable subordinate on-scene to do so. During regular business hours of the public information officer, the on-call supervisor will contact the public information officer and relay the same information for dissemination to journalists not on scene.

4. News releases concerning incidents involving agency policy, the official interpretation of agency policy or investigations of an internal nature will be made by the Chief or her designee.
5. The Watertown Police Department will involve the news media in the development of changes in policies and procedures relating to the public information function.

B. Public Information Officer

The Public Information Officer will act as a coordinator, facilitating the flow of information to the news media. When the PIO is not on-duty, this will be handled by the shift supervisor.

1. The Public Information Officer will, during normal office hours, attempt to comply with media requests for information by notifying the appropriate person to supply the information, be it the Chief, an investigator in charge of the investigation or a member of the Command Staff.
2. Members of the news media will sometimes be dispatched to a news scene that normally would not require the Public Information Officer's presence. However, if the supervisor in charge requests the Public Information Officer's assistance, the Communications Center will make the appropriate contact.
3. When the Public Information Officer is out of the city or incapacitated during normal work hours, the Chief or an on-call individual designated by the Chief may release information from agency files.
4. News releases will be generated for significant events likely to be of interest to the news media. Such news releases will be generated as quickly as practical by the shift sergeant working at the time. Each release will include the name and telephone number of a department member who may be contacted by journalists for follow-up questions.
5. The Communications Division may issue a brief alpha page advisory of significant breaking news events to news representatives who may wish to respond to the scene. These advisories will include the nature of the event, the location and the name of the senior officer at the scene or other contact person. The advisories will be transmitted to all news representatives whose pager numbers have been provided by the Public Information Officer. The Public Information Officer will ensure that the Communications Center has the names and pager numbers of all media representatives who have expressed an interest in immediate pager notification.
6. In the event of extremely newsworthy incidents, the Chief or assigned designee will determine the need for the Public Information Officer's response. When a response is requested, the Communications division will notify the Public Information Officer.
7. The Public Information Officer will endeavor to obtain news coverage of new programs and other positive aspects of Department operations.

C. News Conferences

1. News conferences will be announced through the use of news releases transmitted by electronic mail, facsimile and alpha page transmission to all interested news organizations in the Watertown Police Department area. Department personnel wishing to organize a news conference will give the Public Information Officer at least 90 minutes advance notice to allow for transmission time of the news release and travel time for journalists who may wish to attend.
2. When possible, the Chief, the Investigations Captain, and/or the detective/officer in charge of the case, or other knowledgeable personnel will be present to provide additional background information.
3. Agency representatives should be appropriately attired and respond to inquiries courteously.
4. The Public Information Officer should not respond to improper questions or adversarial situations.
5. Media representatives may be supplied with appropriate press release. This release may include, but are not confined to a general statement detailing the incident, with correctly spelled names, dates of birth and addresses of suspects.

D. News Releases

1. Public information will be released as promptly as circumstances allow in an impartial, courteous and objective manner. The supervisor in charge will provide information to the Public Information Officer, upon the PIO reporting for normal duty, in a timely manner of events or situations likely to be of interest to the news media. Using information provided by this or other knowledgeable

Department members, the Public Information Officer will prepare and disseminate a news release. News releases will be generated by the Public Information Officer as news events occur during working hours and by the Shift Sergeant (or designee) as significant events occur outside of normal business hours. The Public Information Officer will assist with after-hours news dissemination upon request by the Chief or designee.

2. Supervisors will ensure that information concerning newsworthy events which has been released to the news media during the absence of the Public Information Officer is reported to the Public Information Officer as soon as possible. This information may be relayed by telephone, facsimile, electronic mail or copy of the prepared news release.
3. News releases concerning new policies or programs will be coordinated through the Public Information Officer when possible.
4. In instances where more than one agency is involved, the agency having primary jurisdiction will be responsible for releasing, or coordinating the release, of information.

E. News Release Guidelines

The following information may be made available to the news media in criminal matters:

1. The accused/arrested person's name (if an adult), age, residence and charges. Also included will be employment, marital status and any similar background information if known by the investigator.
2. The time, date, location and nature of the reported crime. However, the location will not be divulged if it may identify the victim of a sex offense, or child abuse. Also, the location will not be divulged if it is the home or work address of a victim of aggravated stalking, harassment, aggravated battery, or domestic violence, or the victim has requested confidentiality.
3. The circumstances immediately surrounding the arrest, including the time and place of arrest, resistance, pursuit, possession and use of weapons and a description of items seized at the time of arrest unless the release of such information compromises the on-going investigation. However, consistent with Section E (2) above, the place of arrest will not be divulged regarding victims of certain crimes.
4. The name of any victim, address, age, and sex subject to all conditions listed hereafter. However, consistent with Section E (2) above, the name and/or address will not be divulged regarding victims of certain crimes.
5. Regarding sex offenses and abuse of children, as outlined in Section E(2) above, the general location of the incident (e.g., section of the city such as Northeast, Southeast, Northwest, Southwest.) and a brief synopsis of what occurred.
6. The identity of the investigating or arresting agency and length of the investigation.
7. The type of force used against the victim and extent of injuries to either victim or assailant.
8. The lead investigator of a newsworthy, on-going investigation, or his or her supervisor, will forward all information to the Public Information Officer if release of such will not compromise the investigation or the subsequent prosecution. The Public Information Officer will be responsible for releasing the information to the media. In his absence, this responsibility will rest with the Shift Sergeant (or designee).

F. Release Of Inmate Booking Photos

1. Inmate Booking photos may be released by the Codington County Sheriff and pursuant to their agency policy regarding the dissemination of such.

G. Information Not To Be Released

This section does not apply to the release of information and records to other law enforcement agencies or in response to a judicial order.

1. Information that might jeopardize the successful conclusion of an investigation or the subsequent prosecution. Unless approved by the lead detective or supervisor, employees will not release information concerning ongoing investigations for which they do not have ultimate responsibility.
2. The identity of any suspect prior to arrest or the results of any investigative procedures except to the extent necessary to aid in the investigation, to assist in apprehension of the suspect, or to warn the public of danger.
3. Any opinion as to the guilt or innocence of the accused, the merits of the case or the evidence in the case.
4. Information from NCIC. (National Crime Information Center)

5. Any information revealing the substance of a confession by a person arrested until such time as the case is finally determined by adjudication, dismissal, or other final disposition.
6. The possibility of a plea of guilty to the offense charged or to a lesser offense.
7. Any information (including the photograph, name, address or other information) that reveals the identity of the victim of any sex offense, child abuse or abuse of the elderly.
8. Information on child abuse or aggravated child abuse and juvenile cases except as provided in Section 3 (G).
9. The identity of persons killed or seriously injured, prior to notification of next of kin.
10. Information on elderly or disabled victims of abuse unless the victim is deceased.
11. Confidential information received from another law enforcement agency by the Watertown Police Department.
12. Information revealing the identity of confidential informants or describing surveillance techniques.

H. Juvenile Offender Information

1. The Watertown Police Department will not release juvenile information.

I. Photographing and Interviewing of the Accused by the News Media

1. Members will not deliberately pose any person in custody for news photographers. Nothing herein will be construed to prohibit the accused and/or his attorney from issuing a denial of guilt.
2. Nothing herein will be construed to prevent the news media from taking whatever candid photographs they are able to take of individuals or events without interfering with the agency.

J. Information Relating to Fast-Breaking Events

1. When inquiries are directed to the Communications Center or any Department member concerning fast-breaking events, the employee will verify the occurrence of the event and provide the location of the event. He or she will also provide the name of the ranking officer at the scene as a contact point for news representatives.
2. The officer in charge of the scene will cooperate fully with the all news media representatives within the guidelines set forth by this policy.
3. If the Officer is not available to brief news media representatives or is so involved in the incident that it is impractical to brief the news media representatives at that moment, the officer in charge will make suitable arrangements with the news media representatives to contact them as soon as possible.

K. Media Access to Police-Controlled Scenes

1. In the event of a major crime, incident, or disaster, police lines are established to control crowds, to permit investigation and to preserve evidence. Keeping in mind the purpose of a secure crime scene and considering the tactical situation, the ranking crime scene officer should try to make an affirmative effort to provide news photographers timely access to the crime scene. This access is to be considered with sensitivity to both the need to preserve and protect the crime scene and to the public's interest in observing the investigation. The news photographers may be escorted into specific areas by investigators whenever possible.
2. While news media representatives may be permitted in the area of a crime scene, they do not have the authority to be within a crime scene or area that has been secured to preserve evidence, at any location where their presence jeopardizes law enforcement operations, or on private property (e.g., apartment, single-family house) without the consent of the owner or lessee.

L. News Media Credentials

1. In order to expedite the identification of bona fide representatives of the news media, and in order to assist members of the news media in the performance of their duties, members of the Watertown Police Department will render appropriate assistance to persons holding press credentials issued by recognized news organizations. Adequate identification will consist of a press card provided by the journalist's employer and bearing a photograph of the journalist. Those whose employer-furnished press cards do not have pictures may also be required to produce a driver's license.
2. Media representatives should perform their assigned tasks and not violate the guidelines established in this general order. All violations observed should be forwarded to the Public

Information Officer and the Chief of Police. If the criteria governing conduct has been violated, a written statement will be sent to the individual's employer.

3. The Public Information Officer will be responsible for identifying problems that may occur between our agency and the news media. If these problems are the result of a policy failure, the Public Information Officer will solicit ideas and suggestions from news media representatives and submit a written evaluation of the problem(s) and input from the news representatives to the Chief.
4. Members of the news media are encouraged to participate in the present and future development of this general order by reviewing the policy, and attending meetings scheduled by the Police Department to review and update the agency public information policies. It is important to build a good rapport between the news media and the Watertown Police Department. The Chief may meet with representatives of the news media periodically to address these issues.

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