



Abilene Police Department Operating Procedures

Subject:

Media Releases and Relations

Issued:

07/27/2015

TBP:

5.04

Number:

D-25

Purpose

The Department must have the support of the community to fulfill its goals. Establishing and maintaining an effective relationship with the news media is crucial in accomplishing this mission. This policy establishes guidelines regarding media relations and the release of information to the public through the news media.

Policy

Employees will not release any information that would jeopardize an active investigation, prejudice an accused's right to a fair trial or violate any Texas statute.

The Department will cooperate with the news media and maintain an open communications environment. A positive relationship with the media is mutually beneficial. Information will be released to the news media in an impartial, accurate and timely fashion. It is the responsibility of each employee to abide by this philosophy of cooperation.

Releasing Information

It is ultimately the Chief of Police who is responsible to release information to the public. That responsibility may be delegated to the following personnel:

- A. Public Information officer/coordinator (PIO/PIC) or the designee.
- B. Supervisors with responsibility for a specific case or incident.
- C. Officers directed to release information by a supervisor.

Public Information Officer/Coordinator Responsibilities (TBP 5.04)

The PIO/PIC function is to support the agency and its employees in matters involving the news media. To accomplish this, the PIO/PIC will be available during their normal business hours and be on-call for emergencies and critical incidents.

Designated PIO's/PIC will be required to have some type of formal training prior to taking over the responsibilities of being a PIO/PIC.

The shift commander is responsible for ensuring the PIO/PIC is notified of major crimes and incidents that may generate above-average media response. Normal or usual media responses should be handled by the on-scene supervisor. The on-scene supervisor is responsible for determining when the PIO/PIC should be contacted.

Media Release Procedures

Notification of the next of kin will be completed prior to releasing a critically injured or deceased person's name.



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Media inquiries – the Department will respond to all media inquiries in a timely and professional manner. Media inquiries will be directed to the senior on-duty supervisor who will determine the need for PIO/PIC response.

In the field interviews – these interviews may be conducted without contacting the PIO/PIC. Supervisors or officers conducting these interviews should establish the ground rules for the interview by asking the reporter for the general types of questions which will be asked; inform the reporter which questions will not or cannot be answered and why the questions will not be answered. All conversations with the news media will be considered on the record and the officer will be quoted.

Scheduled interviews – the PIO/PIC will assist the media by conducting interviews themselves or by coordination with other qualified agency personnel. Employees contacted directly by the media will notify the PIO/PIC of the request. All conversations with the news media will be considered on the record and the officer will be quoted.

News releases – news releases will be written and disseminated to the media and within the Department on major incidents and events of community interest or concern. The Assistant Chief of Police of the appropriate division or a designee will approve all news releases prior to release.

News conferences – news conferences will only be held in response to major events of concern to the community. The Chief of Police will be informed and approve all news conferences. The PIO/PIC will facilitate the news conference, which may include the Chief of Police or designee.

Crime and critical incident scene access – Agency personnel will be courteous to news media representatives at crime and critical incident scenes.

- A. Agency personnel will ensure the media respect the established perimeter. Members of the media have no greater or lesser access to an incident scene than members of the general public.
- B. The PIO/PIC, with the on-scene commander approval, may grant closer access to media personnel and their equipment to the degree it does not interfere with the on-going investigation.
- C. Department personnel will not prohibit the media from news gathering practices (photography, interviews, etc.) outside the perimeter.
- D. News media representatives will not be prevented from access to any area solely because of the possibility of injury or death. If this is the only consideration, the media representative will be advised of the danger and allowed to make the decision to enter on their own volition.
- E. Information at crime/critical incident scenes will be released by the PIO/PIC or on-scene commander.



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- F. At critical incident scenes, the PIO/PIC or on-scene commander will establish a media briefing area as close to the scene as safety and operational requirements allow.
- G. At critical incident scenes, members of the agency will work with the media to ensure live broadcasts do not disclose any information that could endanger law enforcement personnel, involved parties or the general public.

Public records – the Department and its employees will abide by all local, state and federal laws governing the release of public records. Questions concerning public records should be directed to the Records custodian.

Access to suspects – suspects or accused persons in custody will not be posed or made available for media interviews by any member of the Department.

Joint investigations/other agency involvement – in a multi-jurisdictional investigation, the lead investigative agency is responsible for providing or coordinating the release of public information. The PIO/PIC or designee for the lead agency will share information with all involved agencies in advance of public dissemination.

Information Release Guidelines

The release of information is subject to restrictions placed by applicable local, state and federal laws. Any information that would hamper the successful conclusion of an investigation or jeopardize the safety of affected persons will not be released.

Information that can be released:

- A. Basic information about a crime or incident;
- B. Basic information about victims, except as excluded by law;
- C. Descriptions of suspects;
- D. Basic description of weapons and vehicles used
- E. Basic descriptions of stolen items;
- F. Basic descriptions of injuries and conditions 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/incident reports and
- I. Booking photographs.

Information that cannot be released:

- A. Names, addresses or any 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;
- B. Names, addresses and basic information about juvenile arrestees;
- C. Active criminal investigative information, active criminal intelligence information and surveillance techniques;



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- D. Names of informants and information provided by them;
- E. Supplemental and investigative reports will not be released until such time as the case is closed or the lead investigator deems it permissible;
- F. Grand Jury testimony or proceedings;
- G. Active internal affairs investigations;
- H. Names of witnesses, unless required by law;
- I. The identity of critically injured or deceased persons prior to notification of next of kin;
- J. Home address, telephone numbers and familial information of law enforcement personnel;
- K. Names of undercover personnel;
- L. Any other information that could jeopardize the successful conclusion of an investigation and prosecution and
- M. Any other information prohibited by state law from being publicly disclosed.

Media Ride-Alongs

Media ride-alongs allow members of the media to accompany law enforcement officers as they perform their duties. Ride-alongs will be in accordance with the Department's ride-along policy.

Training

The Department is committed to providing the proper training for its PIO/PIC, supervisors and officers. Other personnel who interact with the media will be provided access to appropriate training.

Ethics

Departmental personnel will treat the media with professionalism and ethical behavior. It is expected the media will respond in a like manner and follow the ethical guidelines of their profession.

Department personnel who believe they were treated unethically should contact the PIO/PIC who will advise the Chief of Police.

Live Coverage

Live coverage of on-going critical incidents will be coordinated by the PIO/PIC. A media area will be established; taking into consideration the type of incident and the need to prevent the release of information which could compromise the safety of law enforcement personnel and the involved parties of the situation.



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Media Credentials

The Department recognizes representatives from recognized media organizations who carry and/or displays photographic identification issued by their employer. Anyone without such identification is considered as a member of the general public.

Alternative Methods to Disseminate Information

The Department will pursue alternative methods of disseminating information directly to the public. These alternatives may include community newsletters, government cable access television, web sites, social media and public appearances by Department members.

News Conference Guidelines

The following guidelines are provided to ensure that news conferences are consistent in nature. The guidelines should be followed as closely as possible, making exceptions to the format or content as the situation being briefed dictates. The goal of these guidelines is to ensure the public, through the media, are being provided the information they expect and our departmental philosophy is conveyed.

The news conference or briefing should contain the following items in order, as appropriate for the situation:

- A. Welcome, thank you to media and identification of speaker with rank and position;
- B. Reason for the press release, "I have an announcement regarding..."
- C. State the rules of the release:
 1. Will or will not read prepared statement;
 2. Will or will not answer questions and
 3. Limit questions to topic of press release;
- D. Read prepared statement. The statement should be factual and contain enough information to describe the situation so the public has an idea of the circumstances involved in the event;
- E. Conclude the statement with appropriate condolences for involved citizens, officers and community at large (conveys departmental policy philosophy of service, accountability and concern);
- F. Take questions from media, asking them to identify themselves and their media outlet. During national events, preference for the first question should be given to the local media representatives;
- G. Once time is expired for questions, close by taking one (1) more question and telling the media there is time for one (1) more question and
- H. Thank the press again for coming and provide them with the date and time, if able, of the next press conference, if appropriate.