

GENERAL ORDER 54.2.1

News Media Relations

GENERAL ORDER CROSS-REFERENCE: None.

SUMMARY

Establishes a uniform method of informing the news media of police incidents and Departmental activities.

DISCUSSION

Public information is a responsibility of all Department personnel. Members of the news media shall be afforded the fullest cooperation consistent with Department guidelines. News media inquiries relating to police incidents shall be handled expeditiously by the personnel investigating the incident. If the event is of major interest (homicides, shootings involving police officers, and barricaded felons), a designee appointed by a Division Commander shall be appointed to handle media relations.

The Springfield Police Department subscribes to the Oregon Bar Press Guidelines. Those guidelines say, in part, "It is generally appropriate to release the following information: an arrested person's name, age, residence, employment, marital status and similar biographical information; the charge and amount of bail if any; the identity of the investigating and arresting agency; the circumstances of arrest, including time, location, pursuit and weapons used. An exception to this practice shall be made if releasing the information disturbs the basic foundation of an investigation or is detrimental to the prosecution and conviction of the perpetrator."

Members of the department shall not speak on behalf of the citizens of Springfield as this is a function for the City Council. Members may report facts on behalf of the Police Department.

POLICY

I

GENERAL INFORMATION RELEASE PROCEDURE

Personnel in charge of an incident or event shall release information to the media as soon as it is available. In the event of a multi-agency incident, the agency having jurisdiction shall be in charge of all media releases. The Administrative Sergeant or designee shall be responsible for coordinating with other agencies to determine which agency shall be responsible for media releases. Unless a specific time has been set for a news conference or the release of information is being handled by the Administrative Sergeant, members are not required to initiate premature release of information to address news media deadlines.

The same information and access shall be provided to all communications media. Personnel shall not prevent the news media from taking pictures as long as they are in a place in which they have a lawful right to be.

News media may enter dangerous areas at their own risk only after some reasonable level of order or control has been restored. An officer may deny or limit access to the news media if their presence creates an unsafe situation for themselves or others.

At major crime scenes, news media access shall be restricted until permission is given by the officer or supervisor in charge. The news media do not have the right to enter a designated crime scene.

II

NEWS MEDIA INFORMATION - ONGOING INCIDENTS

If an incident is not of major interest but causes news media inquiries, the on-duty supervisor shall designate someone to:

1. Gather all pertinent facts.
2. Answer inquiries as per this procedure.
3. Prepare a written news release containing the author's name, date, time of release, and a brief summary of the incident.
4. Forward a copy of the news release to the Administrative Sergeant, the City's Public Information Officer, the Division Commanders and the Chief of Police.

III

MAJOR EVENT PROCEDURE

Administrative Sergeant, or designee, may be called to major events. Once Community Services personnel arrive on the scene, all news media request and news releases shall be routed through them.

IV

NEWS RELEASES NOT RELATED TO ONGOING INCIDENTS

The Administrative Sergeant shall prepare and disseminate releases of human interest stories, awards, announcements, etc., on request.

Members of the news media shall be afforded the opportunity to review current operational reports that are not marked restricted, and to review the confidential press log on a daily basis. The news media shall be directed to contact the Administrative Sergeant for information on restricted reports.

Supervisors shall be responsible for designating reports as restricted and shall forward a copy of all restricted reports to the Administrative Sergeant.

Any Department member may give news releases and are encouraged to do so. The Administrative Sergeant shall be kept informed of contacts with the news media to maintain continuity of reporting.

V

WATCH COMMANDER RESPONSIBILITY

The on-duty watch commander shall:

1. Have knowledge of the information contained in press releases and be aware of newsworthy events occurring on his tour of duty.
2. Respond to requests from news media representatives concerning Police Department activity, unless relieved from doing so by a higher authority.
3. Refer members of the news media, not satisfied with information provided, to the Administrative Sergeant or any superior officer.
4. Refer members of the news media to the proper agency if Department action involves other agencies.
5. Notify the Administrative Sergeant of any major events requiring news media releases.

VI

TELEPHONE INQUIRIES

Bona fide inquiries from recognized members of the news media shall be referred to the on-duty watch commander and shall be answered if it does not cause undue hardship due to existing work load. The above personnel shall provide information on Department events obtained from the daily log; however, extensive information releases will be provided on the morning of the following day by the Administrative Sergeant.

VII

DELAY IN RELEASE

When it is evident that the news media is in possession of or in the process of obtaining information, the release of which would place human life in jeopardy, escalate a volatile situation, or interfere with a major investigation, the news media will be requested to delay release of the news information until the situation is no longer critical. All such requests are the responsibility of the on-duty watch commander.

VIII

POLICE-NEWS MEDIA RELATIONS

Department personnel shall treat all news media personnel in a professional and courteous manner at all times and afford them the courtesy extended to any other person doing business with the Police Department.

The Administrative Sergeant shall ensure that the news media are afforded an opportunity to comment on any proposed changes to Department policy relating to the news media.

IX

NEWS MEDIA CONDUCT

The Police Department relies upon the policies set forth in the Bar/Press Guidelines to regulate the conduct of the media.

Members of the media violating provisions of the Bar/Press Guidelines that compromise our working relationship shall be brought to the attention of the Chief of Police along with a full accounting of the incident or incidents provoking the difficulty.

X

BAR/PRESS GUIDELINES

The following is a copy of those portions of the Oregon Bar/Press Guidelines which are used in this general order.

"GUIDELINES FOR DISCLOSURE AND REPORTING OF INFORMATION ON CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS"

It is generally appropriate to disclose or report the following:

1. The arrested person's name, age residence, employment, marital status and similar biographical information.
2. The charge.
3. The amount of bail and/or release conditions.
4. The identity of and biographical information concerning both the complaining party and victim. Specific information about sexual assault or hate crime victims should be disclosed only when the public's right to know clearly outweighs the victim's or the complaining party's right to privacy or safety.
5. The identity of the investigating and arresting agency and the length of the investigation.
6. The circumstances of arrest, including time, place, resistance, pursuit and weapons used.

It is rarely appropriate to disclose for publication or to report prior to the trial the following:

1. The contents of any admission or confession, or the fact that an admission or confession has been made.
2. Opinions about an arrested person's character, guilt or innocence.
3. Opinions concerning evidence or argument in the case.
4. Statements concerning anticipated testimony or the truthfulness of prospective witnesses.
5. The results of fingerprints, polygraph examinations, ballistic tests or laboratory tests.
6. Precise descriptions of items seized or discovered during investigation.
7. Prior criminal charges and convictions.
8. Evidentiary details that were excluded in prior judicial proceedings in the same case.

PHOTOGRAPHY

1. Photographs of a suspect may be released by law enforcement personnel provided a valid law enforcement function is served. It is proper to disclose such information as may be

necessary to enlist public assistance in apprehending fugitives from justice. Such disclosure may include photographs as well as records of prior arrests and convictions.

2. Law enforcement and court personnel should not prevent the photographing of defendants when they are in public places outside the courtroom. However, they should not pose the defendant.

The guidelines are cautionary, not mandatory. They do not prohibit the release of, or publication of, information needed to identify or aid in the capture of a suspect or information required in the vital public interest after arrest. Neither do they proscribe publication of information which is already in the public domain."

Richard L. Lewis
Chief of Police

Priority