

OCEAN CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT
Ocean City, Maryland

SUBJECT: Media Relations		NO: 500 M-1
APPROVED/EFFECTIVE DATE MARCH 1, 1988	AMENDS	RESCINDS G.O. 500 M-1
DISTRIBUTION/DATE A	REFERENCES	

.10 Purpose

- A. The Ocean City Police Department is committed to, and recognizes the right of the public and the news media to be fully and accurately informed of all matters concerning public safety. We promote an aggressive policy of presenting public information, rather than merely responding to occasional inquiries.
- B. The relationship between the police department and the news media is one of mutual benefit. The media requires timely and accurate information which the police are more able to provide. The police frequently need the assistance of the medial in the dissemination of information, such as traffic advisories, crime prevention tips, or searches for wanted persons.

.20 The Public Information Officer

The Public Information Officer is organized within the Community Services Section and serves under the Office of the Chief of Police. This office serves as coordinator of information to ensure proper continuity, liaison and cooperation between the department and the news media.

The Public Information Officer (PIO) shall perform the following duties:

- A. Make certain that media representatives are familiar with the policies of the department regarding the media, dissemination of information, contact persons, and access to scenes of incidents.
- B. Serve as the official liaison between media representatives and members of the Department.
- C. Assist police personnel in understanding their responsibilities for the dissemination of public information
- D. Identify news agencies and keep a current listing of agencies' phone numbers and reporters assigned to the police beat.

- E. Establish and maintain procedures for the accreditation of reporters and the issuance of press passes.
- F. Coordinate and arrange press conferences for the Office of the Chief of Police.
- G. Coordinate interviews and appearances between employees of the department and the news agencies.
- H. Assist news personnel in covering routine news stories
- I. Remain on 24 hour call and respond to the scene of any newsworthy event involving the department, at the request of the on scene commander.
- J. Assist the on scene commander in coordinating and managing members of the media during an on scene incident.
- K. Release information on all major incidents.
- L. Assist in crisis situations within the department.
- M. Assist departmental staff officers in handling any problem which may be encountered in dealing with the media.
- N. Assist the Chief of Police in preparing responses to media correspondence.

.30 When To Call In a PIO

Calling in a PIO to the scene of an on going incident can relieve the on scene commander of the responsibility of managing the news media. The PIO will confer with the on scene commander to establish a media staging area. Once this is established, officers on the perimeter should be advised where to direct news media representatives. The on scene commander should strongly consider calling in a PIO for the following incidents:

- A. Natural disasters
- B. Fires resulting in loss of life
- C. Fatal collisions
- D. Deaths of persons in custody
- E. Strikes, riots, etc.
- F. Shootings
- G. Serious injury or death of officer (on or off duty)

- H. Homicides
- I. Bank robberies
- J. Hostage situations
- K. Pursuits that end in collision
- L. Major drug arrests
- M. Any other situation where the on scene commander feels that a PIO's presence would be beneficial

.40 News Release

It is the responsibility of each officer to make sure that a news release is prepared on newsworthy events where a PIO is not on the scene. While it is the primary responsibility of the PIO to release information to the media, members of the department are authorized to release the following information to the media:

- A. Names of individuals involved in an incident requiring a police report. The following persons' names should not be released to the media:
 - 1. Victim's of sex offenses
 - 2. Juvenile defendants; unless charged as an adult
 - 3. Witnesses
 - 4. Deceased persons before next of kin is notified
- B. Factual information concerning an individual involved in an incident, such as name, age, residence or occupation.
- C. Circumstances surrounding an incident or arrest, such as time and place, possession and/or use of weapons, resistance, pursuit, identity of arresting officers, length of investigation, and a general description of items seized.
- D. Additional information which may assist in an investigation, such as lookouts for persons or vehicles.
- E. In administrative/personnel matters, information must be obtained from the PIO or the Office of the Chief of Police.

- F. Members of the department must exercise care, common sense, and discretion to avoid rendering statements or information such, if later quoted, may create a misunderstanding or compromise the effectiveness of the department.

Members shall not release for publication or broadcast, or in a manner likely to result in publication or broadcast, information falling into the following categories.

- A. Information which may jeopardize the successful conclusion of an investigation. Access to crime scenes may also be restricted for this reason.
- B. 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, assist in the apprehension of the suspect, or to warn the public of danger.
- C. Any opinion as to the guilt or innocence of the accused, or to the merits of the case or the evidence.
- D. Arrest records, or statements or information regarding the character or reputation of the accused.
- E. The existence or contents of confessions made by individuals, or the refusal or failure of the accused to make any statement.
- F. The performance of any examinations or tests, or the refusal or failure of the accused to submit to an examination or test.
- G. The identity, testimony, or credibility of any prospective witnesses.
- H. The contents of any suicide note.
- I. The possibility of a plea of guilty to the offense charged or to a lesser offense.
- J. The construction, content, and mechanism of any explosive or incendiary device.
- K. Photographs, except as approved by a PIO.
- L. Information furnished by members of the department to promote publicity for themselves.

.50 Writing the News Release

It is important to remember that the news media needs the same type of information as the police: who, what, where, when, why and how.

The release should be written concisely, but care should be taken to make certain that it does indeed tell a complete story. It should be easy to read. It should also be clear and complete enough to allow someone who was not there to understand exactly what happened.

Care should be taken to omit all police lingo, such as D.W.S, 10 57, 10 96, etc. Military time should also be converted to civilian time.

.60 Press Passes

The Community Services Section issues press passes to all news gathering representatives and photographers that cover police news in Ocean City. It will have their name, photo and agency affiliation, and expiration date.

The purpose of the press pass is to enable the officer to immediately identify members of the news media that happen to appear at an on scene incident. The pass does not grant them any special privileges.

Each person to whom a pass has been issued has agreed, by signature on the application, to assume all risks incidental to the use of the pass; to comply promptly with any reasonable direction of a police officer; and to conduct him/herself in such a manner so as to not interfere with the police mission at hand.

Vehicle passes are also issued to those news gathers that may drive a vehicle that is not obviously marked as a news vehicle. This pass does not grant them special privileges such as illegal parking, not paying meters, etc. It does, however, alert the officer that they are a legitimate member of the media.

.70 Dealing With The Media During On Scene Situations

Official police lines may be established to prevent unauthorized persons from entering the area of a serious police incident or crime scene. It should be understood that those in the profession of journalism, particularly photojournalists, accept the risks associated with their job.

To deny members of the media access to areas of close proximity to a police operation solely for their protection may not be justified. However, if the presence of the media is, in any way, hindering a police operation, they should be directed to the nearest area where their presence will no longer be a hindrance.

Officers should extend every courtesy to properly identified news media reporters and photographers covering an incident at the scene. These courtesies shall permit closer access than that granted to the general public, and shall provide for vehicles and equipment to be located closer, so long as such courtesy does not interfere with either the police mission or with the general traffic flow.

At incident scenes, media personnel should be directed to the media staging area or the PIO. In the event that neither are available, they should be referred to the on scene commander.

News representatives may be granted access to these areas by the on scene commander or his/her designee, or the PIO. Access may be granted if the scene is located on public property, or if located on private property, the owner or his agent consents to the presence of the news media representative.

Members of the department should understand that they have no specific right to deny news media representatives the opportunity to take photographs or video tape police operations or crime scenes from behind police lines. While direct access to crime scenes may be limited, no legal authority exists to stop photographs or video tapes from being taken, even if the scene in question is one the officer feels would be in poor taste to photograph.

.80 Media Relations Manual

All fulltime police officers are issued a manual entitled, "A Guide to Police Media Relations." This manual gives in depth information on how to deal with the media. Officers are encouraged to familiarize themselves with this manual to enable them to feel more comfortable in their encounters with the media.