

Salisbury University Police Department

CHAPTER 54 – PUBLIC INFORMATION

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Salisbury University Police Department

CHAPTER 54 – PUBLIC INFORMATION

The Directives in this chapter relate to the establishment and maintenance of public information to inform the public and news media of events that affect the lives of citizens in the community.

54.1 Public Information

54.1.1 Public Information Function

The University Police Department will make every effort to serve the needs of the public by informing the community, through the media, about crime and police activities. In all matters dealing with the media, every member of the department will make every reasonable effort, consistent with accomplishing the police function, in providing the media with full and accurate material.

The Chief of Police, or his designee, will be the agency's primary Public Information Officer (PIO). Inquiries concerning departmental policies, procedures, practices or relationships with other criminal justice agencies will be referred to the Chief of Police. The University's Press and Publications Office will handle public information for the university in general and will coordinate with the Chief of Police, or his designee, upon request or as necessary for the department's and/or university's needs.

1. The Public Information Officer (PIO) function includes, but is not limited to:
 - A. Assisting media personnel in covering news stories at the scenes of incidents;
 - B. Preparing and distributing department media releases;
 - C. Arranging for and assisting at news conferences;
 - D. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information to the media about victims, witnesses and suspects;
 - E. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information to the media concerning confidential agency investigations and operations;
 - F. Developing procedures for releasing information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort (ie: Wicomico County State Attorney's Office, other local law enforcement agencies, Fire Marshall's Office, etc). This will be a joint effort with other agencies.
 - G. Assisting in crisis situations within the agency, such as a line of duty death or serious injury;
 - H. Promoting professional standards of the agency and its employees;
 - I. Being available for responses to the news media.
2. When the Chief of Police is unavailable for the media, the *Investigative/Support Services Commander* will assume the responsibility of the PIO after consultation with the Press and Publications Office. In the absence of the *Investigative/Support Services Commander*, the Administrative Commander followed by the *Field Operations Commander* will assume the responsibility of the PIO for the department.

(Revised 01/01/2014)

3. Preparation of Public Information Releases:

- A. The PIO, or designated person(s), is responsible for preparing and distributing public information releases. Public information releases will be prepared for, but not limited to:
 - 1. Criminal or other police incidents involving deaths, serious injuries, or extensive losses or destruction of property;
 - 2. Incidents needing assistance from the public;
 - 3. Incidents mandated to be released in accordance with the federal Campus Security Act (Clery);
 - 4. Serious situations, conditions, or incidents affecting the safety or security of the campus community;
 - 5. Incidents of human interest that illustrate agency employees fulfilling social needs or performing heroic or humanitarian services;
 - 6. Disasters, natural or otherwise, involving extensive agency involvement, unless joint operation public information releases are prepared.
- B. Public information releases may be distributed by PIO personnel via:
 - 1. Internet resources, e-mail systems, and telecommunications means;
 - 2. Other venues as determined to be appropriate by the Chief of Police/University PIO.
- C. Information contained in printed public information releases may be viewed, duplicated, faxed, and/or read verbatim to anyone upon request.
 - 1. Any additional information, clarification, or questions from the media, in reference to public information releases or specific incidents should be referred to the PIO or his/her designee.

4. Releasable Information to the Media:

- A. Unless otherwise precluded in Section 5 of this directive, releasable arrest related information is:
 - 1. The name, age, sex, description and residence of arrested adults or juveniles charged as adults;
 - 2. The fact juvenile arrests were made, including sex, age, town or city of residence, and substance of charges;
 - 3. Substance or text of charges as contained in warrants or other charging documents;
 - 4. Identities of arresting officers, except identities of undercover officers;
 - 5. Circumstances immediately surrounding arrests, which may include:
 - a. Time and place of arrest;
 - b. If pursuits occurred;
 - c. Resistance, and if any injuries were sustained as a direct result;
 - d. Possession and/or use of weapons;
 - e. Description of items or contraband seized ;
 - f. Arrestee's disposition.
- B. Releasable investigative related information is:
 - 1. Types and nature of incidents;
 - 2. Locations, dates, and times of incidents;
 - 3. If injuries were sustained by parties involved;

4. The amounts and types of property taken unless precluded by investigative protocols;
5. The race of individuals involved when this descriptive information advances the conduct of investigations, or is germane to the incident;
6. The number of officers or other persons involved in incidents;
7. The names of officers investigating incidents, their supervisors as appropriate, and units to which they are assigned, except undercover officers;
8. Requests for aid in locating evidence, suspects, or complainants;
9. The identity of a deceased victim, except in a suicide, *after notification of next of kin*.

5. Non-Releasable Information to the Media:

- A. After incidents, but before arrests are made or during investigations, information will not be released regarding:
 1. Identities or locations of any suspects, except that the existence of suspects may be acknowledged without further comment;
 2. Results of any investigative or forensic procedures. Facts that tests are being performed may be acknowledged without further comment.
- B. Information will not be released which, if prematurely disclosed, may significantly interfere with investigations or apprehensions. This information includes, but is not limited to:
 1. Unverified information, specifics or details known only to suspects or police which may cause suspects to flee or avoid apprehension;
 2. Identities of prospective witnesses;
 3. Identities of victims and witnesses when such disclosures could prejudice investigations to any significant degree or place victims or witnesses in personal danger.
- C. Information will not be released regarding:
 1. Prior criminal records, character, or reputation of defendants;
 2. Employment or college/university status, unless germane to the case;
 3. Existence, or contents, of confessions, admissions, or statements of defendants, or their failure to make any of these;
 4. Results of any tests, or defendant's refusal or failure to submit to tests;
 5. Identity, credibility, character, statement or expected testimony of any witnesses, or prospective witnesses;
 6. Statements, prospective testimony, character, or credibility of any victims;
 7. Opinions about the guilt or innocence of defendants, or concerning the merits of the case;
 8. Possibility of guilty pleas, plea-bargaining or other dispositions;
 9. Reports, transcripts or summaries of proceedings from which the media and public have been excluded by judicial order;
 10. Photographs of suspects, unless in the public's interest;
 11. Names and photos of juvenile suspects, unless charged as adults;
 12. Names and addresses of victims of sexual assaults or victims of child molestations or related information which, if divulged would tend to lead to the victim's identification;
 13. Names of witnesses or victims or their addresses, unless the release of such information will assist the agency in locating missing persons;
 14. Specific causes of death;
 15. Investigative information or other evidentiary information regarding criminal cases;
 16. Contents of suicide notes;
 17. Personal opinions not founded in fact;

- 18. Unofficial statements concerning personnel or internal affair matters;
- 19. Home addresses or telephone numbers of agency employees;
- 20. Identities of any critically injured or deceased persons prior to notification of next of kin, except after all reasonable efforts to notify families have been exhausted;
- 21. Information received from other law enforcement or public safety agencies without their concurrence in releasing that information.

- D. Any information pertaining to students which would violate the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act will not be released (ie: school status, school records, disciplinary action, etc.)

6. Limitations on Department Employees:

- A. University Police Department employees will only discuss incidents with media representatives, prepare releases, or otherwise provide information to the media, in compliance with this directive after consultation with the Chief of Police, or his designee, and the Press and Publications Office.
- B. Department employees are prohibited from making statements or releasing further information to the media when existing media releases specifically state that the agency will not release any further information or when other limitations have been imposed, unless specifically authorized to do so by the Chief of Police, or his designee.
- C. Nothing in agency directives precludes or diminishes employees' rights of free speech unless their statements:
 - 1. Materially and substantially affects the performance of employees' duties;
 - 2. Affects the discipline, harmony, or general efficiency and effectiveness of the agency;
 - 3. Are not of compelling public interest; or
 - 4. Are specifically prohibited by directives, laws, or regulations.
- D. Department employees will not purposely supply misinformation to the media or the public.

7. Daily Crime Log/Annual Campus Security Report:

- A. The University Police department maintains a daily crime log on its webpage – "CrimeBeat" – which records offenses reported to the University Police Department. This log includes the case number, date, time, type of incident and general location of each incident.
- B. The Administrative Commander and the Chief of Police are responsible for the collection, submission and distribution of the annual Campus Security Report. This report is required by the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act (Clery law), codified as 20 USC 1092 (f) as part of the Higher Education Act of 1965 and discloses timely specific information and annual summary information about campus crimes and security policies. This annual report is completed in October and is available on the department's webpage.

54.1.2 Involvement of the Media in Policy and Procedure Changes

The University Police Department follows the procedures of the University's Press and Publications Office regarding the release of information pertinent to events that occur involving the University or its facilities. As such, when department policies or procedures are developed, copies may be provided, upon request, to all media representatives by the Press and Publications Office. Comments and/or recommendations will be incorporated into departmental policies as appropriate.

54.1.3 Control of Media Access at Certain Scenes

Generally, at scenes of major incidents such as natural disasters, major fires, or at crime scenes, it may be necessary for police to establish perimeters and control access of media representatives. Any such limitations should be clearly explained to media representatives who may not cross an established perimeter unless permission has been granted by the Incident Commander of that scene.

Media representatives should not be in position to interfere with law enforcement operations at the scene of an incident. As soon as possible however, media representatives should be assisted in gaining access to the scene unless denied access for legitimate law enforcement investigative reasons or for safety reasons.

It shall be the responsibility of the University's Press and Publications Official to communicate these guidelines to affected media representatives to ensure their cooperation.

Refer to 46.1.3 (f)

Edwin L. Lashley
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