

St. Joseph, Missouri Police Department



DIRECTIVE TYPE: GENERAL ORDER		INDEX NUMBER: GO0002
SUBJECT: Public Information and Media Relations		
EFFECTIVE DATE: July 19, 2001	REVISED: 7/19/01, 7/21/06, 10/23/07,	AMENDS/RESCINDS: O2005 (Jan. 2,1998)
REVISIONS CONTINUED: 12/14/07, 1/12/12, 6/30/16, 11/7/19		DISTRIBUTION: A

I. Policy

The Department recognizes the need to be open and fair in its relations with the news media and the general public subject to the legal and practical restraints inherent in the nature of law enforcement. The Department is committed to informing the community and the news media of events within the public domain that are handled by the Department. The Department will comply with the provisions of the Missouri Sunshine Law.

II. Procedure

A. Media Access to Police Information/Police Department

The Department recognizes the news media's competitive responsibilities to avail themselves of various police resources. However, the news media is expected to recognize legal constraints upon the Department regarding the release of information. Cases that may have legal restrictions will be referred to the Office of the City Attorney. All inquiries concerning any internal investigation are to be referred to the Office of the Chief of Police. All news media personnel shall be escorted by the police department PIO, a police officer, or other police personnel upon entering the Department's secured area and shall remain with them at all times.

1. Information Sources

It is understood that members of the media may wish to interview the Chief of Police. The Chief of Police will remain accessible for that reason. However, other members who are directly involved in daily operations of the Department are often the ones who can provide the specific information needed. Therefore, it is recommended that the below listed sources be used for specific information needs. The authorized sources of information for release to the news media during normal business hours are:

- a. The Chief of Police for budgetary, statistical, workload, personnel, and policy information.
- b. The Support Services Commander for information concerning recruitment, training programs, community policing, crime prevention, community relations, information from department files, and reports open to the public.
- c. The Investigations Commander for information concerning ongoing criminal investigations, major crimes, or narcotics investigations.
- d. The Patrol Division Commander or the ranking on-duty Patrol supervisor for information concerning field operations, and
- e. The Public Information Officer (PIO) for regular media releases, coordination of interviews, and general release of information.

B. Public Information Officer

The Chief of Police will appoint a Public Information Officer (PIO) for the department. The PIO's term of service will be at the discretion of the Chief of Police. The PIO will compile and distribute news releases, be available to the members of the media for general information purposes, direct the media to the appropriate person for specific information as outlined in this order, and coordinate the media at any major event or occurrence as outlined in this order. The PIO shall be notified when any of the following occurs:

- 1. A homicide;
- 2. A serious assault that may result in death;
- 3. Fatality accidents;
- 4. Officer involved shootings;
- 5. Officer involved accidents;
- 6. Unattended deaths of a suspicious nature;
- 7. Suicides involving public officials;
- 8. Any natural or manmade disaster;
- 9. Any occurrence that is sure to generate high media attention; and
- 10. A major event involving other public service agencies.

C. Media Access To Crime, Accident, Or Incident Scenes

The PIO will coordinate the presence of authorized media representatives when called out to major incident scenes. In instances when the PIO is not required or unavailable, the ranking Patrol or Investigations supervisor at the scene will assist the media. Media access will be governed by the following guidelines:

- 1. Authorized news media representatives may be allowed access to public locations from which they may take photographs or recordings.
- 2. Media access will not hamper police operations.
- 3. The Department has no authority to invite media personnel into private premises without the owner's consent.
- 4. Media access into the inner perimeter may be denied by any Department Member based upon the degree of hazard or to protect the integrity of the crime scene.
- 5. In the event of restricted access, media representatives:
 - a. Will be provided a safe location near the outer perimeter to take photographs and gather information;

- b. Will not be allowed to cross established perimeters; and
 - c. Will be notified when the Incident Commander has appointed a PIO, and will be directed to the command post's information center for news coordination.
6. At no time will media personnel be allowed access to a crime or incident scene without the approval of the Incident Commander.

D. Media Credentials at Scenes

The Department PIO may issue media credentials to authorized media personnel. The Department PIO or his designee will:

- 1. Obtain valid identification that the person is a legitimate media representative;
- 2. Issue media representatives a badge or card identifying them as media representatives; and
- 3. Have the authority to revoke any media credentials.

E. Media Photographers

Department members will use the following guidelines when deciding whether or not to allow media photographers to take pictures.

- 1. Members will not encourage or discourage photographers from taking pictures of persons taken into custody.
- 2. Members will not interfere with photographers taking pictures in public places where they would normally have access.
- 3. The Department expects media cooperation in protecting the identity of "undercover" officers. The Department will be responsible for identifying those officers who should not be photographed.
- 4. Permissible photography includes:
 - a. Pictures of suspects, prisoners, or witnesses seated in public areas of the courts or the Law Enforcement Center;
 - b. Any pictures taken on public property as long as aid to injured persons or police operations are not hindered; and
 - c. Any pictures taken on private property after receiving permission from the property owner, as long as aid to injured persons or police operations are not hindered.
- 5. Department members will not pose or allow photographers to pose a person in custody, or pose an accused person for photographers at or near a crime scene.
- 6. Department owned or produced pictures of persons or occurrences will not be released to the media without the permission of the Chief of Police or command officer in charge of the specific investigation.

F. Responsibility for News Release and Coordination of Information With Other Agencies Involved

Generally, the PIO is responsible for issuing all news releases as necessitated by specific newsworthy occurrences within the Department's service area. If unavailable, the ranking supervisor will be responsible for news releases. Nevertheless, the Chief of Police or the appropriate commander reserves the right to provide information regarding a specific Department unit or section. Information regarding programs or administrative changes that have not been

implemented is not released without the prior approval of the Chief of Police. Information concerning a multi-agency incident is released with the authorization of the designated Incident Commander through the designated PIO, after consultation with the affected agencies. Requests for information about cases or incidents not involving the Department should be referred to the agencies involved. When multiple agencies are involved in incidents, the agency having primary jurisdiction should coordinate the release of information to the media.

G. News Releases

The PIO will establish hours to be available in order to accommodate the needs of the media, within reason. The PIO will attempt to provide the media appropriate information without undue delay.

This information may include the following:

1. Complaint report number;
2. Date, time, and location of occurrence;
3. Offense or nature of incident;
4. Victim's name, age, and address, except if a juvenile or an adult victim of a sexual assault;
5. Suspect's name, age, city and state of residence, type of employment, and description, except if a juvenile and only after being charged; and
6. A brief narrative concerning a general description of the events, circumstances of arrest, or requests for assistance.

H. Information Prohibited from Release

Information that is prohibited from release includes:

1. Any investigative report;
2. Any opinion regarding a suspect's guilt or innocence, the merits of a case or evidence in a case;
3. The existence or content of admissions or confessions made by individuals or the failure or refusal of the accused to make a statement;
4. The performance or results of any examination or test or the refusal of the accused to submit to an examination or test, except those associated with alcohol related offenses;
5. The identity, testimony, or credibility of any prospective witness;
6. Speculation concerning the possibility of a plea of guilty to the offense charged or a lesser offense;
7. Information that might limit the future effectiveness of investigative or operational techniques; and
8. Information declared confidential by statute including child abuse reports, alcohol commitments, mental commitments, and names of juveniles.
9. Any photos, or details about photos, taken at a scene. This specifically includes photos taken on the officers' personal mobile devices, while on duty. Crime scene photos shall be taken for law enforcement use only.

I. Information Permissible for Release

Information that may be released includes:

1. The defendant's name, age, description, residence, employment, marital status, and similar background information, unless the defendant is a juvenile; and only after being charged;

2. Basic information on juvenile defendants, not to include name and address;
3. The identity of the arresting and investigating agency and the length of the investigation;
4. The circumstances immediately surrounding the arrest including:
 - a. Time and place of arrest;
 - b. Pursuit;
 - c. Possession and use of weapons;
 - d. Description of items seized at the time of the arrest;
 - e. Use of search and arrest warrants; and
 - f. The authority issuing the warrants.
5. The disclosure of the nature, substance, or text of the charge;
6. A brief description of the offense charged;
7. The announcement of scheduling, or the result of any stage of the judicial process; and
8. Requests for assistance in obtaining evidence.

J. NEWS RELEASE DISTRIBUTION

After a news release has been prepared, copies of the release will be distributed to the:

1. Chief of Police and members of the Command Staff;
2. City Manager, who will be notified by the Chief, and
3. Media personnel who desire this service to be provided to them.

K. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER RELEASE OF INFORMATION

St. Joseph Communications Center employees will:

1. Verify that an event is occurring, and its location, if aired previously, and refer media to the on-duty Patrol supervisor or the designated PIO;
2. Refer all requests for information concerning incidents outside of the City of St. Joseph to the appropriate jurisdiction;
3. Provide no information that could hamper the investigation/prosecution of a criminal case;
4. Refer all major event inquiries to the PIO; and
5. Will not release any information received via teletype or 911.

L. INTERVIEWS AND EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION WITH THE MEDIA

The Department encourages its employees to be available to media personnel to assist them with information when practical. Officers shall notify their supervisors of the information provided and their comments. Shift supervisors should be contacted before any sensitive information is released concerning police department operations, programs, incident, cases, or personnel issues. Supervisors will include in their shift reports any information that may attract media attention.

The Department recognizes that off-duty officers may speak to media personnel off-duty without prior approval on issues not related to actual police cases, incidents, and/or personnel investigations.

Media personnel are invited to initiate meetings with command staff periodically regarding any changes in policies and procedures that deal with the media, and the

public information function of the Department. The date and time of these meetings will be determined by the availability of department staff.

Chris Connally, Chief of Police

Date