




COLUMBIA POLICE DEPARTMENT

"Policing Excellence through Community Partnerships"

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1.0 NEWS RELEASES AND MEDIA CONTACTS

In dealing with the news media, it is the goal of this department to be as open as possible without in any way jeopardizing any investigation in progress or releasing any information not part of the public record that may harm the reputation of any individual.

1.1 News Releases

The Chief of Police is the primary spokesman for the department and he will designate a staff officer to be the spokesman when he is not available. The PIO is the immediate point of contact for media inquiries.

All written news releases or news conferences will be approved by the Chief of Police, Deputy Chief or the department Public Information Officer (PIO) before release to the media. News releases and press conferences will be made when necessitated by specific occurrences or at the discretion of the Chief of Police or the PIO. News releases will also be prepared for the initiation of new programs where the publication of such information is in the best interest of the Columbia Police Department.

Only the Chief of Police will authorize the release information regarding civil litigations, internal investigations, personnel matters, and complaints against department members or information regarding internal discipline.

The decision to release information pertaining to an ongoing investigation will be made by the Chief of Police or his designee.

1.2 Media Contacts

The Department Public Relations Officer (PIO) has the on-call contact responsibilities for all media inquiries into Department activities and operations. Any member of the Department that is contacted by the media for information will refer them to the PIO.

2.0 INFORMATION FOR RELEASE TO THE MEDIA

The department's procedures in dealing with the news media will be guided by the spirit of The Freedom of Information Act of the State of South Carolina. Citizens and members of the news media will be afforded reasonable access to all public documents. Requests for access to individual officers for interviews will be directed to the PIO who will consult with the Chief or Deputy Chief before granting access. The decision will be based on the following:

- Availability of the officer so that interviews do not interfere with any investigation or with the off-duty time of the officer.
- A determination by the Chief or Deputy Chief that the interview is in the best interest of the department.
- Subject to the understanding that an officer will neither comment nor offer an opinion on any pending litigation or action filed against the officer and/or the City of Columbia.

The following information will be released to the news media by the Public Information Officer, upon request after consulting with the Department legal advisor:

- Incident reports
- Arrest warrants (served)
- Statistical data
- Names of employees
- Salary ranges of officers and employees
- Exact salary of the department head
- Property room files
- The type of event or crime
- The location, time, injuries sustained or damages incurred
- Identity of victim

EXCEPTIONS:

- When the release of identity could endanger the victim
- Identity of a deceased victim is not released until notification of next of kin
- Identity of criminal sexual conduct victims not released
- Identity of juveniles not released
- The circumstances immediately surrounding an arrest: time, place of arrest, resistance, pursuit, possession and use of a weapon, and a general description of items seized at the time of arrest providing that such disclosure will not compromise the defendant's rights or the integrity of the investigation
- Whether or not there are suspects and their descriptions, if available
NOTE: An arrest warrant must have been signed on a suspect before his identity can be released.
- The arrested person's name (except juveniles), age, address, marital status, occupation

- The issuance and service of a search warrant, and the positive or negative results of the search.
- Where the identity of a suspect has not been established, it may be desirable to publicize descriptions, artist sketches, or other information that could lead to the identification and arrest of the suspect
- Names of departmental officers involved in accidents
- When recognition is desirable, names of arresting or investigating officers may be incorporated into news releases
- Names of officers hurt or fatally injured will be withheld until notification of the officer's family has been made

The department will keep confidential any information listed above if at any time the release of that information may jeopardize an investigation or pose a threat to the health or safety of any officer of the Columbia Police Department, any other law enforcement agency, or any employee or citizen of the City of Columbia.

3.0 INFORMATION NOT RELEASED TO THE MEDIA

The following information will not be provided to the news media upon request:

- The names of suspects, informants or witnesses
- Investigative reports and associated materials without a FOIA request
- Exact salaries of individual officers and employees other than the department head
- Personal information regarding officers, including home telephone number, work assignments, etc.
- The identity of victims of criminal sexual conduct
- The identity of suicide or attempted suicide victims (inquiries will be referred to the Coroner's office)
- The existence of statements, admissions, or confessions by an accused person
- No information as to the results of examinations or tests, or the refusal by the accused to take them
EXCEPTION: refusal to take a Datamaster test.
- Non-conviction data (arrest without conviction or arrest without a disposition within one year of arrest)
- Reenactment of a crime by a suspect, or the fact that the suspect may have shown investigators where a weapon or other evidence was located.
- Personal opinions of any type involving a case or any reference to the defendant's character
- The construction, content, and mechanism of any explosive or incendiary device
- Contents of a suicide note. Its existence may be reported without further comment.
- Results of Internal Affairs Investigations, unless the investigation results in formal charges being filed and the Chief approves
- Personal reasons for employee's separation from the Department

- Amount of money taken in robberies

At times, there may be reason to release information from some of the above areas when the Chief of Police or his designee determines that the release of the information is in the best interest of the department.

Any time information is released to a member of the news media; the office of the Chief of Police or the POI will be notified at the earliest possible time.

4.0 NEWS MEDIA CREDENTIALS

The Columbia Police Department will recognize the media identification provided by the State Law Enforcement Division.

5.0 MEDIA ACCESS

News media access shall be restricted at incident locations where such access would have the potential to interfere with public safety operations.

No member of the Columbia Police Department will authorize a media representative to enter privately owned property. The private citizen having control of the property may allow access.

The following procedures will be established for media access to incident locations:

5.1 Crime Scenes/Traffic

At the scene of any major crime or serious traffic accident, officers shall establish an outer perimeter. No media personnel will be allowed beyond the outer perimeter until the investigation has been completed and all evidence has been photographed, processed and secured by departmental personnel. Basic information will be made available to media personnel as soon as possible through the Chief, Deputy Chief or Public Information Officer.

No member of the department will attempt to deny or restrict media representatives or the public from taking photographs of an area or an individual from the outer perimeter location. No member of the department will deliberately pose a person under police control for photographs or filming.

5.2 Fire Scenes

The senior fire official on the scene will determine the media's access to any major fire scene where the public needs to be kept at a safe distance.

5.3 Disaster Locations

In the event of a natural or man-made disaster the media will be kept outside the outer perimeter unless the incident commander decides otherwise. A public information area will be established for the media in accordance with procedures established in the All Hazard Plan.

6.0 NEWS RELEASES INVOLVING MULTI-AGENCY OPERATIONS

In any instances in which this department is acting in cooperation with one or more agencies, the agency having primary jurisdiction will be responsible for disseminating information to the media.

