

COLCHESTER POLICE DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: Media Relations & Release of Info

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POLICY: It is the policy of the Colchester Police Department to serve the public by cooperating with the news media and maintaining an atmosphere of open communication. A positive working relationship with the media is mutually beneficial. To this end, information will be released to the news media in an impartial, accurate and timely fashion. It is the responsibility of each employee to abide by this philosophy of cooperation. No employee shall release any information that would jeopardize an active investigation, prejudice an accused's right to a fair trial, or violate any law. Additionally, CPD will abide by all state and federal laws governing the release of public records.

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I. Responsibilities in Releasing Information

It is the responsibility of the agency head to release information to the public. That responsibility may be delegated to the following personnel:

- A. Public Information Function – Normally, the Chief and LTs shall serve as the primary contacts for the news media. In major incidents, Command Staff will designate a PIO to be the primary contact with the media.
- B. Supervisors – In the absence of Command Staff, Supervisors shall be the point of contact for the news media.
- C. Other Employees – Any supervisor may direct other employees to respond to media inquiries. Additionally, other employees may be granted permission to release information on an ongoing basis via social media or other means.

II. Procedures for release of information

- A. Media Inquiries – The agency will respond to all media inquiries in a timely and professional manner. During normal business hours, media inquiries shall be directed to a member of the Command Staff [a LT or the Chief]. After hours requests shall be directed to the on duty officer in charge.
- B. Interviews – All supervisors are responsible for assisting the news media by conducting interviews or coordinating interviews with other agency personnel. Employees contacted directly by the media shall notify their LT of any interview requests. All conversations with members of the news media should be considered “on the record” and subject to being quoted.
- C. News Releases – News releases shall be written and disseminated to the media and within the agency on major incidents and events of community interest or concern. News releases on agency awards or accomplishments shall be disseminated as appropriate. Any agency member can prepare a news release. All news releases should be reviewed by a supervisor prior to release, unless exigent circumstances make the immediate release of information necessary.
- D. News Conferences – News conferences will be held only in connection with major events of concern to the community. The Chief and Town Manager will be informed of all news conferences prior to the event.
- E. Access to Crime Scenes and Critical Incidents – Agency personnel should be courteous to news media representatives at crime and critical incident scenes.
 - 1. At such scenes, agency personnel shall ensure that the media respect the established perimeter. Members of the media have no greater or lesser access to an incident scene than members of the general public.
 - 2. With approval of the scene commander, a supervisor may grant closer access to news personnel and their equipment, to the degree that it does not interfere with law enforcement operations.
 - 3. No member of this agency shall prohibit the media from news gathering practices, including photography and interviews, outside the established perimeter.
 - 4. News media representatives shall not be prevented from access to any area solely because of the possibility of their injury or death. If this is the only consideration, the media representative should be advised of the danger and allowed to make the decision to enter on his/her volition.

5. Information at crime/critical incident scenes will be released by the designated P.I.O. or scene commander.
 6. At critical incident scenes, the P.I.O. or scene commander will establish a media briefing area as close to the scene as safety and operational requirements allow.
 7. At critical incident scenes, members of the agency will work in close cooperation with the media to ensure that live broadcasts do not disclose any information that could endanger law enforcement personnel or the general public.
- F. Public Records – This agency and its members will abide by all local, state and federal laws governing the release of public records. Requests from the general public for release of records shall be handled by the Records Unit. Prior to release of the requested information, a member of the Command Staff should review the request and the material to be released.
- G. Access to Suspects – Suspects or accused persons in custody shall not be posed or made available for media interviews by any member of this agency.
- H. Joint Investigations/Other Agency Involvement – In a multi-jurisdictional investigation, the lead investigative agency is responsible for providing or coordinating the release of public information.

III. **Information release guidelines**

The release of information is subject to restrictions placed by applicable local, state and federal laws. Further, any information that would hamper the successful conclusion of an investigation or jeopardize the safety of affected persons will not be released. Generally, any information that can be released to the media is also able to be released to members of the public upon request. Requests for written documents or other police records shall be directed to the Records Unit.

- A. Information that **can** be released – Upon inquiry, or when an employee determines a press release is appropriate, the following may be released:
1. The name, age and hometown of a person charged with a crime, the charge and the date of arraignment;
 2. Any information necessary to aid in the apprehension of a person formally charged or to warn the public of any danger posed by a suspect;
 3. The facts and circumstances of an arrest, including the date, time, and location of the arrest, general statements about any pursuit, resistance or weapons used, to include those

issued a citation to appear in court as an adult, or who has been jailed;

4. A brief description of evidence seized, without any further comment;
5. The identity of the investigating officer(s) and/or arresting officer(s) and the anticipated length of the investigation;
6. Whether the suspect was arrested with or without a warrant and a brief description of the offense charged along with the name of the court issuing the warrant, and the expected date and location of arraignment;
7. Bail information, if known;
8. Booking photographs of persons arrested by CPD;
9. Descriptions of suspects or persons that law enforcement is trying to locate as part of an investigation;
10. Name, age, hometown of operators involved in crashes; [except in the case of serious injury or death, release will only be made after notification of next of kin].
11. Basic information about victims of crimes (except as noted below) such as the age and gender of a victim, general statements about injuries, etc. Generally speaking, crime victims' names will not be released publicly until after arraignment and then only if identified in the affidavit of probable cause.

B. Information that **cannot** be released, unless it is contained in a public file:

1. Names, addresses or any information that would identify the victim of a sex offense, child abuse or neglect, domestic violence or any other crime where the privacy of the individual is protected by law. This includes persons who are taken into protective custody due to mental illness or incapacitation.
2. The identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to notification of next of kin.
3. Names, addresses and basic information about juvenile arrestees as governed by state law.
4. Active criminal investigative information, active criminal intelligence information and surveillance techniques.

5. Names of informants and information provided by them.
6. Names of complainants unless an individual has specifically authorized release of their name to the media/public.
7. The identity, testimony or credibility of any witness or prospective witness;
8. Any opinion as to the guilt or innocence of the accused or to the possibility that a plea of guilty may be entered; or, any opinion as to the merits of the case or of the evidence in the case; the prior criminal record of the accused, or any commentary on the character or reputation of the accused.
9. The existence of or the contents of any confession, admission or statement made by the accused or the failure or refusal of the accused to make any statements (except that it may be stated that the accused denies the charges);
10. Personnel matters including the existence of internal affairs investigations.
11. Home address, telephone numbers and familial information of law enforcement personnel.
12. Names or any identifying information of undercover personnel.
13. Information concerning the planning of raids or other specialized enforcement efforts without the express permission of the Chief of Police.
14. Any other information that could jeopardize the successful conclusion of an investigation and prosecution, or that could compromise the safety of any agency member.
15. Any other information prohibited by state law from being publicly disclosed.
16. The results of any examination or tests made, or the refusal or failure of the accused to submit to any test or examination, unless the refusal is the basis of charge (DUI – refusal).

IV. Media Credentials & Media Ride Alongs

This agency acknowledges representatives from recognized media organizations who carry and/or display photographic identification issued by their employer. Anyone else is considered a member of the general public.

Members of the media have the same ability to conduct a ride along as any other member of the public. Ride along requests must be made to the Operations LT and scheduled accordingly. Members of the media may not film or record any portion of the ride along without the expressed permission of a Command Staff member prior to the ride along.

V. Alternative Methods of Information release to the Public

It is the policy of this agency to pursue alternative methods of disseminating information directly to the public. These may include community newsletters, government access cable television shows, web sites, social media, public appearances by agency members, public area bulletin boards and others.

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