

PUBLIC INFORMATION

23.1 PUBLIC INFORMATION

PHILOSOPHY: The Lakewood Police Department recognizes the public's right to know what the department does in fulfilling its responsibilities. It is the belief of the department that maintaining a cooperative relationship with the news media is an important asset to all. This relationship is a key aspect of providing the public with information and building community trust and support. In order to fulfill this function, Public Information Officers (PIO) have been designated to coordinate news media relations and the release of information regarding on-going criminal incidents to the news media.

23.1.1 Public Information – Activities

Principle: The release of information to the news media or other entities must meet investigative, legal, and ethical expectations. For those reasons, it is important that Lakewood Police Department employees that have received specialized training in these areas release information. The practices provided below will assist in assuring that accurate and emergent information is released appropriately.

- A. Assisting the News Media at Incident Scenes: It is the responsibility of all department members to maintain professional relations with those who gather to report the news at an incident scene. The following practices will be used to facilitate the corresponding responsibilities of the police and the news media.
 - 1. Notification: Any department member that becomes aware of the news media's presence at an incident scene will immediately inform the on-scene supervisor. The on-scene supervisor can request that a PIO respond to the scene.
 - a. If the on-scene supervisor determines that important information exists which should be released immediately to ensure either the public's welfare or assist in the apprehension of a suspect(s), the scene supervisor should consult with the CDO for immediate release. Refer to Section E of this Standard regarding the type of information that may be released.
 - b. Patrol supervisors should anticipate the response of the news media during major incidents and may request a PIO immediately.
 - 2. Access to Scene: Refer to Standard 23.1.3.
 - 3. Information Briefing: The scene supervisor will coordinate a briefing for the Public Information Officer once he/she arrives at the incident scene. This briefing should occur as soon as practical. Updates should be provided as needed to keep the Public Information Officer abreast of significant information.
- B. Preparing and Distributing News Releases:
 - 1. Definition: A "News Release," as used in this chapter, is any form of written or electronic communication released through the use of print, radio, television, internet, or social media outlets. This includes the city and department's website, blog, Facebook, Twitter, or other social media accounts.
 - 2. Preparing News Releases: A Public Information Officer generally prepares news releases. If a Public Information Officer is unavailable, the Command Duty Officer will prepare any necessary news releases. If the release concerns an ongoing investigation, it should be prepared with the assistance of the appropriate investigative supervisor.
 - 3. Approval and distribution of News Releases: News releases will first be reviewed and approved by the Chief of Police, Assistant Chief or the affected section Lieutenant. The Legal Advisor should be consulted if there is the potential for future civil litigation.
- C. News Conferences: A News Conference, as referred to in this section, is a pre-planned meeting with

representatives of two or more news media agencies. All requests for news conferences regarding an event or incident involving the Lakewood Police Department shall be arranged through a Public Information Officer. No news conference will be conducted without the approval of the Chief of Police. Refer to Section H of this Standard for News Conference involving other agencies or city departments.

- D. Information to be released: A listing of the type of specific information that may be released is maintained by the Public Information Officer and is available to the Command Duty Officers.
 - 1. In general information will not be released:
 - a. When prohibited by legal or constitutional restraints.
 - b. When the information to be revealed is critical to the successful conclusion of a criminal investigation.
 - c. When the information would disclose police strategy essential to criminal apprehension.
 - d. When the information would reveal sources of information that require anonymity.
 - e. When personnel information is requested. This information is released at the discretion of the Chief of Police.
 - f. When the city or department is involved in civil litigation regarding a case. This information is released at the discretion of the Legal Advisor in consultation with the City Attorney.
 - g. Opinions regarding a subject's character, guilt, or innocence or other information pertinent to the case.
 - 2. Victims: The identity of victims of homicide or attempted homicides will not be released until the next-of-kin have been notified. The names of other victims of violent crimes and sex crimes should not be released routinely and only per legal requirements and the restrictions.
 - 3. Witness/Suspects: The release of names of witnesses and suspects will be released per applicable laws.
 - a. If the photograph is of a suspect involved in an ongoing criminal investigation, the CIU Lieutenant or designee must approve the release of the photograph.
 - b. No suspect in police custody will be deliberately posed for representatives of the news media.
- E. Confidential Investigations and Operations: News media inquiries regarding confidential investigations or operations will be directed to the PIO or designee. The PIO will then consult with the Assistant Chief regarding any information to be released.
- F. Coordination for Multiple Agency/Department Events: The Public Information Officer will act as a liaison to other agencies and/or other departments when other jurisdictions are involved in an incident. The Public Information Officer's role will be to assist in the coordination of the release of information regarding the incident.
 - 1. Activation of the Lakewood Emergency Operations Center: In matters when the Emergency Operations Center has been activated, all news media contact should be coordinated through the Incident Commander.
 - 2. The Chief of Police or designee may assume responsibility for media activity when multiple agencies or departments are involved.
- G. Public Information Officer Availability: A Public Information Officer will be available on a 24-hour, 7 days a week basis to respond to incident scenes in order to facilitate the collection of information by the news media. If a Public Information Officer is unavailable, the Command Duty Officer or designee will fulfill the Public Information Officer function.

H. Other Interviews:

1. Media Requests for Interviews: When a news media representative requests an interview and/or a ride-a-long with any member of the Lakewood Police Department (other than a Public Information Officer) in relation to their position with the department, the request shall be forwarded to the Assistant Chief through the chain of command. The interview and/or ride-a-long will only take place with prior approval from the Assistant Chief.
2. Employee Requests for Interviews: Employee requests for interviews or release of information regarding internal grievance issues are not to occur without prior review by the Chief of Police or designee.

Other Requests for Information: The Lakewood Police Department receives numerous requests for information from various sources besides the media industry. In order to ensure the effective and legal dispersal of requested information, the appropriate releasing authority for the department must review these requests. The following types of information requests will be forwarded to the appropriate authority as outlined below.

- I. Statistical, Crime Rate, Budgetary, Planning or Policy: All requests will be forwarded to the Office of the Chief of Police or to designated representative. All requests pertaining to the preceding topics will require the approval of the Chief of Police prior to issuance. Routine requests for crime statistics related to a specific neighborhood or apartment complex will be forwarded to the Crime Analyst.
- J. Training and Personnel Programs: All requests will be forwarded to the Assistant Chief.
- K. Dispatch Records: Requests for information regarding dispatch services will be forwarded to the PIO for review. When appropriate, he/she will coordinate the release of the requested information with SOUTHSOUND 911 Communications.
- L. Criminal Records or Police Reports: All requests coming from SOUTHSOUND 911 Records will be forwarded to the Public Information Officer, who will authorize information to be released in accordance with public disclosure laws.
- M. On-going Criminal Investigations: All requests will be forwarded to the CIU Lieutenant for review.
- N. Field Operations Activities: All requests regarding the general activities of any unit will be forwarded to the PIO.
- O. Personnel Files or Complaint Investigations: All requests regarding information contained in personnel files or related to the investigation of complaints will be referred to the Public Disclosure process.

23.1.3 News Media Access

Principle: Representatives of the news media, including photographers, will be allowed access to the below listed areas under the control of the police if they display the proper identification/credentials.

- A. Scenes of natural disasters, other catastrophic events, major fires, or public disturbances/demonstrations.
- B. Outside the perimeter of crime scenes.
- C. EXCEPTIONS SHALL BE:
 1. When the presence of news media representatives jeopardizes the safety of others.
 2. When on private property and the owner does not grant permission for news media access.
 3. When the presence of news media representatives unreasonably interferes with or obstructs the responsibilities of public safety personnel.

- D. In the case of announced major events such as demonstrations; the department will designate a specific on-scene site for media. A Public Information Officer will be available at that site to answer questions.
- E. News media representatives will not be permitted to accompany the police into private residences (or any area where there is a recognized expectation of privacy) without the consent of the owner.

Officers shall not prevent news media representatives from conducting interviews of person not in police custody. However police interviews with witnesses and/or victims will take precedence.