

NEW CANAAN POLICE DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: PUBLIC INFORMATION

GENERAL ORDER NUMBER: 88-8-52

FILE: PR 1 OPERATIONS SUPPORT

I PURPOSE/POLICY

It is the policy of the New Canaan Police Department to closely observe the right of the community to be informed of events occurring within the community that are handled by, or involve the police department. To this end the Department cultivates and maintains a relationship with the press and broadcast media.

II RESPONSIBILITY

It is the responsibility of all department personnel to adhere to this general order. It is the additional responsibility of all supervisory and command staff to insure compliance.

III PROCEDURES (ORGANIZATION & ADMINISTRATION)

A. The function of the Public Information Officer shall include the following:

- 1.** Assisting members of the media who cover routine news stories, unusual events and if necessary, at the scenes of incidents.
- 2.** Being available to respond to the media when the need arises.
- 3.** Preparing and disseminating departmental news releases.
- 4.** Arranging and assisting in the preparation of news conferences.
- 5.** Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses and suspects.
- 6.** Assisting in extraordinary or crisis situations within the Department.
- 7.** Coordinating and authorizing the release of information relevant to confidential investigations and operations in the Department.
- 8.** Developing procedures for the release of information on situations when other public service agencies have been involved in a mutual aid effort with the Department.

- B** The duties of the Public Information Officer are part of the office of Community Relations/Crime Prevention. The Public Information Officer shall be under the direct supervision of the Chief of Police.

IV PROCEDURES (PRESS RELEASES)

- A** The Public Information Officer shall consult with the Chief of Police in determining:
 - 1. The frequency of press releases related to normal police operations.
 - 2. The need for special releases based upon specific or unusual occurrences.
 - 3. That the information released is appropriate and accurate.
 - 4. That the information is made available to all area news media on an equal access basis.

V PROCEDURES (DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION BY DEPARTMENT MEMBERS)

- A** Under normal circumstances, the Public Information Office will prepare press releases concerning newsworthy events and disseminate information to the media. The Public Information Officer, however, is only available during a limited time during the day. When the Public Information Officer is unavailable, other members of the police department who are authorized to release information are:
 - 1. The shift supervisor, or if the shift commander designates, the senior officer at the scene of the incident being investigated.
 - 2. The Investigative Section Commander may release information regarding on-going investigations that he/she is supervising.
 - 3. Officers with special assignments or duties that are of interest to the general public.
 - 4. The desk officer/dispatcher may release information specifically written for release by the Public Information Officer or other authorized person, which has been left at the main desk.
- B** When an incident involves mutual aid (Law Enforcement Agencies, Emergency Services or other public service agencies) that necessitates the release of information to the media, the following procedures shall be followed:
 - 1. The Chief of Police or his designee will first approve the release of any information pertaining to a major incident, likely to have heavy media coverage.
 - 2. The Public Relations Officer or other department officer responsible for the release of information should confer with the highest ranking officer at the incident scene regarding the release of information.
 - a. This conference is to determine which agency or agencies will be responsible for releasing information to the press. Normally, the agency that has overall control of the incident scene shall be responsible for this task.

- b. If it is determined that a multi-agency press release is appropriate, the exchange of information should be sufficient to insure that the information released by all agencies is consistent
 - 1) Whenever possible copies of each agencies press release should be forwarded to the Public Relations Officer.
- C Information relating to the internal personnel files and investigations shall not be released to the media without prior approval from the Chief of Police.
- D Any interdepartmental notifications (re: General Order #87-7-42, Notifications) shall be completed prior to the supervisor informing the media of the incident.
- E The Public Information Officer shall be called back to duty if a situation arises which would generate a great deal of media attention. The shift supervisor shall be responsible for the release of information to the media prior to the arrival of the Public Information Officer.
- F When a media representative is denied access to information, that representative shall be given a courteous explanation as to the reasons for the denial.

VI PROCEDURES (MEDIA CREDENTIALS/RECOGNITION)

- A Employees of this department shall not impede the lawful activities of the news media. Media personnel must however, recognize that they are not exempt from state, federal or municipal ordinances.
- B To insure that the information concerning an event is recorded safely and in an orderly fashion, an officer may request verification of employment either in the form of a press pass or an employee identification card. Any person not holding either of these credentials may be asked to leave the scene.

VII PROCEDURES (MANAGEMENT OF THE MEDIA AT CRIME SCENES)

- A The Public Information Officer, his/her designee or the supervisor at the scene shall coordinate the accessibility of the media personnel, including photographers, to the scene of a crime or any other major event. Such events may include:
 - 1. Scenes of major fires
 - 2. Natural disasters
 - 3. Other catastrophic events
- B Police lines may be established in order to prevent unauthorized people from entering a restricted area. Dependent upon the tactical situation and the likelihood of jeopardizing police operations, media personnel may be permitted in such areas.
- C While media personnel may be permitted within a restricted area, they do not have the authority to be:
 - 1. Within a crime scene or area that has been secured in order to preserve evidence.
 - 2. At any location where their presence may jeopardize police operations.

3. In areas that could place a citizen or police officer at risk of injury or death.
4. On private property after the owner of said property has requested that they leave.

D The restrictions outlined above shall be communicated to the media personnel as swiftly and courteously as is practicable.

VIII PROCEDURES (CHANGES IN THE MEDIA POLICY)

A The police department values free press and recognizes the role that it plays in serving the public. In order to maintain a good rapport with the media, the Department shall, whenever possible, attempt to contact media representatives and encourage their comments concerning policy changes being considered which would have a direct effect on the media. Through the exchange of information, it is hoped that the policies formulated by the Department will be considered reasonable to all parties involved.

1. Copies of these policies shall be made available to the media in order to ensure the policies are properly communicated thereby, enhancing cooperation between the Department and the media.

IX PROCEDURES (GUIDELINES FOR THE RELEASE OF INFORMATION)

A. The Public Information Officer and other officers authorized to release information to the media, shall use the following guidelines in determining what information is appropriate for dissemination:

1. Information released prior to arrest:

- a. Information that is of a factual matter.
- b. Edited information concerning criminal acts and traffic accidents that is contained on the face of the incident report and traffic accident report forms.
- c. A brief description of the exact offense to include:
 - 1) Location
 - 2) Time
 - 3) Injuries sustained or damages resulting from the incident.
- d. After satisfying notification of the next of kin, the identity of any crime victim other than a sex crime victim.
- e. Information concerning unidentified suspects to include:
 - 1) A general description
 - 2) Vehicle description
 - 3) Other pertinent information

- f. Identification and photograph of a fugitive for whom a warrant has been issued.
- g. The criminal background of a fugitive, if the public should be alerted.
- h. The name of the officer/supervisor in charge of the investigation.

2. Information not released prior to arrest:

- a. Information that is a subjective matter.
- b. The identity of witnesses and/or victims who can identify the suspect. In some highly sensitive cases, the mere existence of witnesses shall not be revealed.
- c. Exact information concerning an ongoing investigation whether it is a crime or traffic accident, shall not be released if the information would jeopardize the investigation or prosecution of the suspect.
- d. The identity of suspects that are interviewed but not charged.
- e. Information on matters that are currently in litigation in the courts.
- f. Information that may incur liability on the town.

3. Information not released prior to arrest without proper authorization:

- a. The identity of sexual assault victims.
- b. The identity of juvenile offenders as specified in state law without approval of the juvenile court judge.
- c. Information regarding any departmental member under an internal investigation.
- d. Information concerning the death of a person will not be released without approval from the Medical Examiner's Office, and in criminal cases, the Commander of the Investigative Section's approval is also required.

4. Information released after the arrest:

- a. The time and place of the arrest.
- b. The arrestee's name, age, sex, race, residence and charges may be released after charges have been filed with the Clerk of the Courts.
- c. The circumstances surrounding the arrest, such as the place of arrest, residence, pursuit, use of weapons and evidence seized, may be released if this information will not hinder the outcome of the case.
- d. The name of the arresting officer and the duration of the investigation.
- e. Scheduled dates for various stages of the judicial process.

5. Information not released after arrest:

- a. Information regarding the character, reputation, or prior criminal record of the defendant.
 - b. Mug shots/photographs of the accused.
 - c. Confessions, statements or refusal of same by the accused.
 - d. Results of any tests or examinations taken by or given to the arrestee.
 - e. Results of any laboratory tests or examinations regarding evidence at crime scenes.
 - f. Information of a subjective manner or any remarks concerning the guilt or innocence of the accused.
 - g. Any personal information concerning the victim of a crime that may identify that victim.
 - h. Re-enactment of the crime or information concerning the accused directing officers to the location of evidence or contraband.
 - i. The identity, credibility or statements of a witness or prospective witness.
 - j. Information received from other law enforcement agencies without prior approval from the participating agency.
 - k. Information from departmental personnel regarding the merits of the case or quality of the evidence gathered.
- B.** When any information is disseminated under the above guidelines by an officer, other than the Public Information Officer, a copy of the release shall be forwarded to the Public Information Officer by the that officer.
- C.** The Public Relations Officer should maintain all original copies of press releases in His/Her office.

X PROCEDURES (MULTIPLE JURISDICTIONS)

- A.** When the New Canaan Police Department has primary jurisdiction over an incident involving other service agencies (e.g. other police agencies, fire departments, ambulances, medical examiner's office etc) the Public Information Officer or other designated officer shall work closely with the other agencies involved. This will insure accuracy in the coordination and release of information to the media.
- 1.** When the department does not have primary responsibility over an incident, the news media and other representatives seeking information will be referred to the agency/department having primary responsibility.

XI DISTRIBUTION

This general order will be reproduced in electronic and traditional media. All sworn personnel shall have access to Department general orders through a read-only file on their individual domain of the Department's computer network. Printed copies and/or CD's will also be placed in locations throughout headquarters so that they are easily accessible to all personnel.

XII EFFECTIVE DATE

This general order approved by the Police Commission on October 19, 1988 and is effective January 30, 1989.
Revised May 2000

Per Order

Edward J. Nadriczny
Chief of Police