

## Duties of Public Information Officer

### 216.1 DUTIES OF PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

Agency Content NYSLEAP - 8.4 - 2.2

(a) Public Information Officer

1. The Chief of Police may designate members of the Department to serve as Public Information Officers (PIO's) in order to promote cooperation between the news media and this Department and to ensure the flow of accurate information to the news media in a timely fashion regarding specific police functions, and incidents that are of interest to the general public.
2. Whenever a PIO is absent or otherwise unavailable, the Officer in Charge may release information to the media/public in accordance with this procedure.
3. The PIO shall be responsible for the dissemination of information to the community and news media in accordance with all applicable laws.
4. Specific responsibilities of the PIO shall include, but not be limited to the following:
  - (a) Preparing and distributing department news releases.
  - (b) Coordinating and authorizing the release of information regarding victims, witnesses, and suspects.
  - (c) Assisting media personnel in conveying routine news stories.
  - (d) Assisting the news media at critical incidents or unusual incidents.
  - (e) Being available for on-call responses to the news media.
  - (f) Responding to requests for information by the news media.
  - (g) Arranging press conferences.
  - (h) Consulting with and assisting other members of the department regarding media and public requests for police information, reports and statistical data, information concerning confidential agency investigations and operations, ongoing criminal investigations, and information regarding the application of Article 6 of the Public Officers Law (Freedom of Information Law), Civil Rights Law-Right Of Privacy, Family Court Act and other applicable laws governing the release of information.

(b) Routine Incident Inquiries

1. Whenever the news media requests information on routine matters, they shall be directed to contact the PIO.
2. Members of the Department shall notify the PIO of all newsworthy incidents, as soon as practicable.
3. Supervisors may release information on routine incidents to the news media if a PIO is not available.

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4. The unauthorized and uncoordinated release of information to the news media, even if such information is not considered unusually sensitive, is prohibited.

(c) Unusual Incident Inquiries

1. Information requests by the news media regarding unusual incidents or incidents with potential controversy, are to be referred to the Chief of Police or his designee.
2. Under no circumstances are any employees to release information directly or indirectly to members of the news media without receiving approval from a supervisor.

(d) Command Officer Responsibilities

1. Command Officers will be responsible for the dissemination of information to the PIO and the Chief of Police.
2. In the absence of the Command Officer, the Officer in Charge will be responsible to disseminate information to the PIO and the Chief of Police.
3. News release information may be in the form of a written press release, requests for interviews, or requests for the re-production of certain police documents that fall under the Freedom of Information Act.
4. In the absence of a PIO, the Command Officer or Officer in Charge will act as the Department's PIO. In such, instances he shall assume the responsibilities of the PIO as described in this policy.

(e) Daily Release of Police Arrests/Investigations

1. It will be the responsibility of the Command Officer or Officer in Charge to release daily information on routine arrests and investigations.

(f) Information not to be released to the media or public

1. Under no circumstances will a member of the department release any information that either identifies or may lead to the identification of any victim of a rape or sexual assault. Members are advised that if the release of the identification of the suspect may directly or indirectly lead to the identification of a rape or sexual assault victim, the suspect information will not be released.
2. The prior criminal record or references to the character or reputation of involved persons.
3. The existence of any confession, admission of guilt, or statement of the accused, or the failure or refusal by the accused to make a statement.
4. The results of any examinations or tests, or refusal of involved persons to submit to any examinations or tests.
5. Police reports will be released pursuant to department policy, rules, and regulations.
6. The identity, testimony, or credibility of any prospective witness.

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7. Any opinion of department personnel regarding the guilt or innocence of the accused.
  8. Any opinion of department personnel regarding the merits of the case or quality of evidence gathered.
  9. Personal information regarding the victim.
  10. The name or any information concerning juveniles.
  11. Any inflammatory statement that might have a detrimental impact on the investigation or prosecution of the case.
  12. The mental state of the suspect.
  13. Explicit details of a particularly hideous crime.
  14. Generalizations regarding race, sex, religion, or national origin.
  15. The name(s) of deceased victims until after the notification of the next of kin has been made.
  16. Information that could interfere with an on-going investigation or endanger the life or safety of a person.
  17. Any personal information about any member of the department (e.g. personal records, home address or telephone numbers, performance evaluations, etc.).
  18. Information from a member's personnel file.
  19. Information received from other law enforcement agencies.
  20. Information concerning internal affairs investigations and personnel matters.
  21. Any information prohibited by federal or state law.
- (g) Multiple Agencies
1. When other agencies, such as other law enforcement agencies, fire departments, coroner's office, etc. are involved in a mutual effort, the agency having primary jurisdiction in the matter shall be responsible for releasing or coordinating the release of the information.
- (h) Information that may be released after an arrest has been made of persons over the age of 19
1. The arrested person's name, age, and residence.
  2. The offense or offenses the defendant has been charged with
  3. The location, date, time, and a brief description of the incident.
- (i) News media access to incident and crime scenes
1. Members of the news media, including photographers, may be granted access to the perimeter (i.e. safe public areas) of crime scenes, major fires, natural disasters, catastrophic events, etc.
  2. Members shall not permit news media to enter such scenes if their presence will:

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- (a) Contaminate or potentially contaminate evidence.
    - (b) Interfere with an on-going investigation.
    - (c) Create, or potentially create, a hazardous or unsafe condition to media personnel themselves, or to others.
  3. Upon authorization of the on-scene Incident Commander, representatives of the news media who are properly identified by credentials, may be allowed access to areas normally closed to the general public for the purpose of obtaining information or photographs. They shall not be authorized to be within a crime scene or locale where their presence may jeopardize an investigation, integrity of evidence or personal safety. If it is necessary to exclude a member of the news media from the scene of an incident, it shall be done with tact and in a professional manner. When possible, an explanation for such action should be provided.
  4. News media vehicles may not violate traffic laws. At the scene of a newsworthy event, officers should extend whatever parking privileges are possible, providing such privileges do not endanger the public safety, hamper the flow of traffic or interfere with public safety operations.
  5. Any unusual or unique situation that develops involving the news media shall be brought to the attention of the Incident Commander and Chief of Police.
- (j) Press Releases
1. Whenever practical, press releases shall be issued to release information to the media concerning unusual incidents or department information.
  2. The Chief of Police, Command Officer, or PIO shall approve the subject matter of press releases prior to their release.
  3. Information shall be equally available (i.e., equal access) to all news media.
- (k) Press Conferences
1. The PIO shall be responsible for arranging and conducting press conferences for major incidents, investigations, or emergencies. Press conferences shall be conducted to provide the media with timely and accurate information, while maintaining the integrity of the investigation or the response to the emergency.
  2. Authorized representatives of the news media shall be given equal access to press conferences.
- (l) Requests for Media Appearances
1. Whenever a member receives a request for a media appearance, the request will be referred to the Chief of Police.
  2. Upon approval of a request, the Chief of Police will designate the department member who will respond to the request.
- (m) Order in which to notify/utilize the Public Information Officers

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1. Matters investigated by the Detective/Narcotics Bureau- The Detective Bureau Supervisor is the primary PIO
  - (a) In the Detective Bureau Supervisor's absence:
    1. The PIO will be the Captain of Patrol
2. Matters handled by or regarding the Patrol division - The Captain of Patrol is the primary PIO
  - (a) In the Captain of Patrol's absence :
    1. The PIO will be the Day Shift Commander/Supervisor with PIO Training
  - (b) If the Captain of Patrol and the Day Shift Commander/Supervisor are unavailable:
    1. The PIO will be the Midnight Shift Commander/Supervisor with PIO Training