

GREENVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

Chapter 54	Public Information	
Date Initially Effective: 07/30/94	By the Order Of: Mark Holtzman, Chief of Police	
Date Revised: 04/17/17	Date Reissued: 06/30/17	Page 1 of 4

54.1.1 COMMITMENT TO THE COMMUNITY

CALEA Standard: 54.1.1

Public Information Function

The Greenville Police Department is committed to informing the community of events that occur within the jurisdiction of the Police Department and events that involve the Police Department. Law enforcement agencies must have the support of their communities in order to operate efficiently. By providing the public with information on Departmental administration and operations, the Greenville Police Department can foster a relationship of mutual trust, cooperation, and respect. In order to facilitate this commitment to the public, the Greenville Police Department has established a public information function to include:

- Assisting news personnel in covering routine news stories and at major crime scenes
- Being available for on-call responses to the news media
- Preparing and distributing agency news releases
- Managing departmental social media pages and website
- Arranging for and assisting at news conferences
- Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects
- Assisting in crisis situations within the agency
- Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential investigations and operations, Department activities, and personnel issues
- Developing procedures for releasing information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort
- Assisting in the release of information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort

Public Affairs Responsibility

The Greenville Police Department has one primary Public Information Officer (PIO) and other officers designated to serve in that capacity as backups. Additionally, other employees may be designated to serve as police spokespersons for specific situations or events. The PIO holds primary responsibility for coordinating the public information function. The PIO or designee shall be responsible for coordinating the release of information pertaining to crime incidents and operational activities of the Police Department. The PIO or designee is on-call twenty-four (24) hours a day. The PIO shall be contacted when any of the following incidents have occurred and a news release prepared:

- Homicide
- Any incident, crime, catastrophe, special event or an unusual occurrence of a magnitude that will create a high interest by the community
- Any incident or occurrence in which the Chief of Police or his designee feels the dissemination of information is in the best interest of the community

The on-duty supervisor has the authority to call out the PIO for any situation deemed necessary.

Procedures for News Releases

The Greenville Police Department shall cooperate fully and impartially with representatives of the news media in their efforts to gather and disseminate information consistent with established procedures. Full cooperation between the news media and law enforcement agencies in the prompt and accurate dissemination of information to the public is a continuing goal. These procedures are intended to protect the delicate balance of rights and duties of both the news media and the police. They are also intended to provide basic control required by the Greenville Police Department in order to protect its own physical security, the security of its employees and the rights of suspects, arrestees, and witnesses related to a crime or other police-related incidents. Procedures for news releases include:

- News releases will be prepared and disseminated as necessitated by specific occurrences
- Subject matter for news releases will cover investigative reports, arrests, information on outstanding warrants and wanted individuals, traffic fatalities, and information about newsworthy incidents
- News releases will be disseminated to all legitimate local news media in a way that ensures that first-release information is equally available
- All news releases shall be prepared on the approved Greenville Police Department news release form
- Any information concerning Greenville Police Department personnel shall not be released without the permission of the Chief of Police or designee

Personnel Authorized to Release Information

Specific personnel are authorized to release information within the guidelines of this directive as follows:

- At the scene of an incident, information may be released by the Public Information Officer, Watch Commander, Chief of Police, or a designee regarding the particular incident.
- Information on Department personnel matters or discipline shall only be released by the Chief of Police or a designee.
- Information concerning Department plans, policies, or administrative changes shall only be released by the Chief of Police or a designee.
- The news media and public shall be entitled to public information pursuant to the guidelines set forth in Chapter 82 of the Greenville Police Department Policy and Procedures Manual. Information concerning a specific ongoing criminal investigation may be released by Command staff or supervisory personnel after notifying and consulting with the Public Information Officer.
- Non-supervisory personnel (unless already designated as a shift PIO) are prohibited from releasing information to the media without permission from the PIO. Once an investigation has been turned over to Criminal Investigations, Field Operations Bureau Supervisors should refer questions concerning ongoing criminal investigations to the PIO, who will address the inquiry or forward it to the appropriate function for response.
- Telecommunicators are authorized to confirm basic information for the media to include the type of call and time it happened. However, if a reporter is requesting additional information after normal working hours, they shall be referred to the shift PIO. If the shift PIO is unavailable the Watch Commander shall assume responsibility for responding to the media requests.
- The Traffic Safety Unit, or responding officer (regardless of rank), is authorized to release details of crash scenes to the media, with the exception of crashes involving a fatality.
- On special occasions there are opportunities where police officers and/or other Department personnel will be showcased by the media, these opportunities must be pre-planned interviews or stories that have been approved by the PIO or Chief of Police.
- Select Departmental personnel have been trained as PIOs in order to aid the full-time PIO on an *as-needed* basis. The PIO shall make the determination when supplemental PIO staffing is needed.

Unavailability of the Public Information Officer

It is the responsibility of the PIO to designate a trained PIO to handle his/her responsibilities anytime he/she has prior knowledge that he/she will be unavailable. However, there will also be unexpected instances during which the PIO will not be available.

In the event of a pre-planned absence from PIO duties, the PIO shall:

- Ensure the availability of a trained PIO to maintain continuous PIO coverage for the Department
- Notify the media and the Department the name of the designee, along with the starting and ending date(s) of temporary coverage

When the PIO has been contacted by an on-duty supervisor regarding a newsworthy incident and is unavailable, the following shall occur:

- The PIO shall authorize the on-duty supervisor to contact a trained PIO designee
- The on-duty supervisor shall be responsible, if requested, for preparing a news release at the direction of the PIO or designee and forwarding a copy to the PIO.
- The PIO designee shall respond appropriately to the newsworthy incident and shall ensure a copy of the news release is forwarded to the PIO.
- If the designated backup PIO is unavailable or a PIO is not assigned to the shift, the Watch Commander should respond to media requests, talk to media on-scene, and/or release preliminary information about the current incident. All on-camera interviews with the media will be handled by an on-duty PIO or the Watch Commander.

Release of Information

The following information is available upon request to news media personnel in criminal matters, unless such a release would compromise an investigation:

- The time, date, location and nature of a violation or apparent violation of the law
- The name, sex, age, address, employment and alleged violation of law of a person arrested, charged or indicted, if 16 years of age or older
- The name, sex, age, and address of a complaining witness unless the release of the information is likely to pose a threat to the mental health, physical health, or personal safety of the complaining witness, or compromise a continuing or future criminal investigation
- Information provided from out of state agencies meeting the contributing state's guidelines for release of information
- Service agencies that have assisted the Police Department with an incident should always be recognized in a news release. The agency that has the primary jurisdiction will be responsible for coordinating the release of information

The following information *should not* be released to the news media:

- Statements related to the character or reputation of an accused person or a prospective witness
- Admissions, confessions, or the contents of a statement or alibi attributable to an accused person
- The performance on the results of any tests, or the refusal of the accused to take a test or to participate in a lineup, except that which is a matter of public record
- Audio or video recordings controlled by the Police Department or the City of Greenville, unless in compliance with N.C.G.S. 132-1.4A and the provisions set forth in Chapter 83 of departmental Policy and Procedure
- Statements concerning the credibility or anticipated testimony of prospective witnesses
- The possibility of a plea of guilty to charges or to a lesser offense, or any other disposition
- Opinions concerning the evidence or any argument in the case whether or not it is anticipated that the evidence or argument will be used at trial
- The contents of any note or message left by the victim of a suicide

54.1.2 MEDIA PARTICIPATION IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

CALEA Standard: 54.1.2

The contents of this directive and all subsequent changes shall be furnished to all local news media and to other media upon request. News agencies are invited and encouraged to participate in the formulation of policy and procedures relating to the news media by providing comments and suggestions.

54.1.3 SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS AT INCIDENT SCENES

CALEA Standard: 54.1.3

News Media Credentials

The Greenville Police Department neither issues nor revokes media credentials. The Greenville Police Department recognizes valid identification from all news agencies. Due to the public purpose served by these agencies, media privileges are extended to properly identified representatives; however, news media privileges will not be extended to unaffiliated (free-lance) writers, photographers, or other members of the public.

If a police officer feels an individual no longer should be granted press privileges due to the conduct of the news media representative, the police officer should make a full written report to the Chief of Police through the chain of command. The Chief of Police will determine whether contact with the media organization is appropriate.

Special or Undercover Operations

On occasion the media will arrive on scene during a special operation at a time that information should not be released. The supervisor in charge should request the reporter not to air the operation or incident at this time. The media will be allowed to video segments of the operation for future newscasts, however, if the operation involves undercover officers the supervisor should advise the reporter that undercover officers should not be videoed.

Scenes of Major Fires, Natural Disasters, or Other Catastrophic Events

Media access to fire scenes and the release of information concerning the operation shall be controlled by the fire official in charge. Police officers at the scene shall confer with the fire official in charge and assist in establishing an observation point from which media personnel may observe and photograph proceedings.

Media access and the release of information concerning other incidents at which police are serving in an assisting role (e.g., hazardous material spills) will be the responsibility of the official in charge at the scene.

Access to Crime Scenes

Crime scenes should be determined and clearly marked with crime scene tape. Police Department personnel are to extend every courtesy to news media representatives who are actively covering an incident. However, unless specifically authorized by the Chief of Police or ranking scene supervisor, and with appropriate escort, media representatives shall not be allowed inside an established crime scene. Access to crime scenes after those scenes have been released from police control is at the discretion of the owner of the scene and media representatives.

If circumstances necessitate, the Public Information Officer or designated police spokesperson may establish a designated media area or areas near an established scene. Such areas should sufficiently provide for media equipment without interfering with law enforcement operations.

Additional locations

Media access at additional locations where such access would interfere or interrupt with normal law enforcement operations will be controlled by the on-scene Public Information officer, or supervisory personnel. Specific gathering areas for media access should be designated in order to prevent any unnecessary disruption of law enforcement activities.