
Media Relations

345.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidelines for media releases and media access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies and other law enforcement activities.

345.2 RESPONSIBILITIES

It is the policy of the Vancouver Police Department to provide accurate, timely information to the news media and to the public provided such information does not jeopardize active investigations or violate the law. Members of the Vancouver Police Department who speak to the media about agency matters shall confirm that they do so in accordance with this policy. The ultimate authority and responsibility for the release of information to the media shall remain with the Office of the Chief; however, in situations not warranting immediate notice to the Chief of Police, and in situations where the Office of the Chief has given prior approval, the Public Affairs Manager, designated Public Information Officer(s) (PIO) or on-duty Shift Sergeant may prepare and release information to the media in accordance with this policy and the applicable law.

The Public Affairs Manager, or above referenced designee, shall respond to media requests for information through means that are appropriate for the situation. Information may be released via social media, email, written media release, by phone, in person or a combination of multiple communication methods. Information will be released as promptly as circumstances allow.

345.2.1 DEFINITIONS

Pursuant RCW 5.68.010(5), the term 'news media' means:

- (a) Any newspaper, magazine or other periodical, book publisher, news agency, wire service, radio or television station or network, cable or satellite station or network, or audio or audiovisual production company, or any entity that is in the regular business of news gathering and disseminating news or information to the public by any means, including, but not limited to, print, broadcast, photographic, mechanical, internet, or electronic distribution;
- (b) Any person who is or has been an employee, agent, or independent contractor of any entity listed in (a) of this subsection, who is or has been engaged in bona fide news gathering for such entity, and who obtained or prepared the news or information that is sought while serving in that capacity; or
- (c) Any parent, subsidiary, or affiliate of the entities listed in (a) or (b)

345.2.2 MEDIA REQUEST

Any media request for information or access to a law enforcement incident response shall be referred to the Public Affairs Manager, or if unavailable, to the first available Shift Sergeant or designated PIO. Prior to releasing any information to the media, employees shall consider the following:

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- (a) At no time shall any employee of this Department make any comment or release any official information to the media without prior approval from a supervisor or the designated Department media representative.
- (b) In situations involving multiple law enforcement agencies, every reasonable effort should be made to coordinate media releases with the authorized representative of each involved agency prior to the release of any information by this Department.
- (c) Under no circumstance should any member of this Department make any comment(s) to the media regarding any law enforcement incident not involving this Department without prior approval of the Office of the Chief.

345.3 MEDIA ACCESS

Authorized members of the media shall be provided access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies and other law enforcement activities subject to the following conditions:

- (a) The media representative shall produce or display valid press credentials while in areas otherwise closed to the public.
 - 1. Press credentials can include official media organization photo identification card, clothing and/or equipment that visibly shows media organization logo or other visibly displayed identifier.
- (b) At the scene of any event of public interest, representatives of the news media will be permitted to conduct interviews, take photographs, and otherwise perform their assigned tasks provided their activity is not in violation of the guidelines established in this policy, and provided such activity does not interfere with law enforcement operations or result in significant disruption of business operations for members of the public.
- (c) The media should not be excluded from areas otherwise open to the public.
- (d) Reasonable effort should be made to provide a safe staging area for the media that is near the incident and that will not interfere with emergency or criminal investigation operations.
- (e) Members of the Department shall be professional and courteous with representatives of the news media.
- (f) Whenever the presence of media or other aircraft pose a threat to public or officer safety or significantly hampers incident operations, to include use of a law enforcement UAS, the field supervisor should consider requesting a Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR). All requests for a TFR should be routed through the Shift Sergeant. The TFR request should include specific information regarding the perimeter and altitude necessary for the incident and should be requested through the appropriate control tower. If the control tower is not known, the Federal Aviation Administration should be contacted (14 CFR 91.137).
- (g) No member of this Department who is under investigation shall be subjected to media visits or interviews without the consent of the involved employee.

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- (h) Media interviews with individuals who are in custody shall not be permitted without the approval of the Office of the Chief and the express consent of the person in custody.

A tactical operation should be handled in the same manner as a crime scene, except the news media should be permitted within the outer perimeter of the scene, subject to any restrictions as determined by the supervisor in charge. Department members shall not jeopardize a tactical operation in order to accommodate the news media. All comments to the media shall be coordinated through the Public Affairs Manager or a supervisor.

345.3.1 PROVIDING ADVANCE INFORMATION

To protect the safety and rights of officers and other persons, advance information about planned actions by law enforcement personnel, such as movement of persons in custody or the execution of an arrest or search warrant, should not be disclosed to the news media, nor should media representatives be invited to be present at such actions except with the prior approval of the Office of the Chief.

Any exceptions to the above should only be considered for the furtherance of legitimate law enforcement purposes. Prior to approving any exception, the Office of the Chief will consider, at minimum, whether the release of information or presence of the media would unreasonably endanger any individual, prejudice the rights of any person or is otherwise prohibited by law.

345.4 NEWS CONFERENCES

News conferences will be conducted only with the approval of the Chief or designee. Such approval must be obtained via the chain of command.

345.5 SCOPE OF INFORMATION SUBJECT TO RELEASE

The Department will provide information regarding significant law enforcement activities, to media representatives through the Public Affairs Manager. When requested, additional information may be made available (RCW 42.56.070(1)). This update will generally contain the following information:

- (a) The date, time, location, case number, type of crime, extent of injury or loss and names of individuals (except confidential informants) involved in crimes occurring within this jurisdiction unless the release of such information would endanger the safety of any individual or jeopardize the successful completion of any ongoing investigation.
- (b) The date, time, location, case number, name, birth date and charges for each person arrested by this Department unless the release of such information would endanger the safety of any individual or jeopardize the successful completion of any ongoing investigation.
- (c) The time and location of other significant law enforcement activities or requests for service with a brief summary of the incident subject to the restrictions of this policy and applicable law.

Identifying information concerning deceased individuals shall not be released to the media until notification of next of kin or otherwise cleared through the Clark County Medical Examiner's Office.

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Any requests for copies of related reports shall be referred to the Vancouver Police Records Division. Such requests will generally be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Public Records Act (RCW Chapter 42.56.001 et seq.).

345.5.1 RESTRICTED INFORMATION

It shall be the responsibility of the authorized employee dealing with media requests to ensure that restricted information is not inappropriately released to the media by this Department.

The Department will not release the following information in connection with an ongoing investigation of an event or crime:

- (a) The identity of a suspect prior to arrest unless such information would aid in apprehending the suspect or serve to warn the public of potential danger;
- (b) The identity of any victim of a sex crime or any related information which, if divulged, could lead to the victim's identity;
- (c) The identity of victims or witnesses if such disclosure would prejudice an investigation to any significant degree, or if it would place the victim in personal danger;
- (d) The name of any juvenile who is a suspect in an investigation. The exception to this would be to assist investigators in apprehension of a suspect who is wanted in connections with a serious felony crime.
- (e) The identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to confirmed notification of the next of kin;
- (f) The results of any investigation procedure such as lineups, polygraph tests, fingerprint comparison, ballistics test or other procedures (the fact that these tests have been performed may be revealed without further comment);
- (g) Information which, if prematurely released may interfere with the investigation or apprehension such as the nature of leads, specifics of an "MO", details of the crime known only to the perpetrator and the police, or information that may cause the suspect to flee or more effectively avoid apprehension;
- (h) Information that may be of evidentiary value in criminal proceedings;
- (i) Specific cause of death unless officially determined by the medical examiner;
- (j) The home address of telephone number of any member of the Department; and
- (k) Any matter of Departmental policy or rules and regulations unless directed to do so by the Chief of Police or designee.

Following arrest and formal charging of a suspect, but prior to adjudication, the following information will not be released:

- (a) Prior criminal conviction record, character or reputation of a defendant;
- (b) Existence or contents of any confession, admission or statement of a defendant, or failure or unwillingness to make a statement;
- (c) Performance or results of any tests, or a defendant's refusal or failure to submit to tests such as a polygraph;

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- (d) Identity, statement or expected testimony of any witness or victim;
- (e) Statements about credibility or the anticipated testimony of witnesses;
- (f) Any opinion about the guilt or innocence of a defendant, or the merits of the case (including evidence or arguments of the case);
- (g) The content of a statement or alibi attributable to the defendant; and
- (h) Any opinion or knowledge of the potential for a plea bargain or other pretrial action.

When in doubt, authorized and available legal counsel should be obtained.