
Media Relations Procedure

346.1 MEDIA PHILOSOPHY

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

Community support is a critical goal for the Union City Police Department, and fluid communication and operational transparency are essential for maintaining public's trust and understanding. To these ends, maintaining an effective and mutually beneficial relationship with the news media is crucial.

Members of this agency will treat members of the media with professionalism and ethical behavior at all times.

346.2 POLICY

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It is the policy of this agency to cooperate with the news media and to maintain an atmosphere of open communication. Appropriately releasable information will be provided to the news media in an impartial, accurate and timely fashion. No employee shall release any information that would jeopardize an active investigation, prejudice an accused's right to a fair trial, or violate any law.

The ultimate authority and responsibility for the release of information shall remain with the Chief of Police, however, the Chief of Police may delegate to the designated Public Information Officer (PIO) or Watch Commander the preparation and release of information to the media in accordance with this procedure and applicable law.

346.2.1 PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER DUTIES

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- (a) Members of the Public Information Officer Team shall serve as the designated PIO and shall be the primary contact for routine news media inquiries. The PIO team functions to support the agency in operational matters of media interest.

A designated or delegated member of the PIO team will be available during normal business hours. During off hours the designated PIO or delegated member of the PIO team should be available for consult on issues of media interest. The shift watch commander shall be responsible for ensuring the designated PIO is notified of major incidents and all other events that may generate media interest. In the event a member of the PIO team is unavailable, the Watch Commander may prepare and release information to the media in accordance with this procedure.

346.3 PROCEDURES FOR RELEASING INFORMATION

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- (a) Media inquiries: The Union City Police Department should respond to all media inquiries in a timely and professional manner. During normal business hours, media inquiries shall be directed to the first available PIO Team member.
- (b) Interviews: Members from the PIO Team are responsible for conducting or coordinating media interviews. Employees contacted directly by the media shall notify the PIO Team Lieutenant of any interview requests. No member of this Department shall be subject to media visits or interviews without the employee's consent [Government Code § 330 (e)] and authorization according to this Procedure. All conversations with members of the news media should be considered "on the record" and subject to being quoted.
 - (a) Media requests to visit or interview individuals in police custody shall not be permitted without the approval of the Chief of Police and the express consent of the person in custody.
- (c) News Releases: News releases shall be written and disseminated to the media and within the agency on major incidents and events of community interest or concern. The PIO Team Lieutenant or Watch Commander shall evaluate the risk of jeopardizing investigations or police operations to make a determination as to the best point in time to release the appropriate information.
- (d) News Conferences: News conferences may be held in connection with major events of concern to the community. The Chief of Police shall be informed of all news conferences, prior to their occurrence. PIO Team members will facilitate the news conference, which may include the Chief of Police or his or her designee.
- (e) Access to Crime Scenes and Critical Incidents: Agency personnel shall be courteous to news media representatives at crime and critical incident scenes. In accordance with Penal Code § 409.5(d), bona fide 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:
 - 1. Media representatives shall produce valid press credentials and shall prominently display those credentials at all times while in areas otherwise closed to the public
 - (a) This agency acknowledges representatives from recognized media organizations who carry and/or display photographic identification issued by their employer. Anyone else is considered a member of the general public
 - (b) Media representatives should be prevented from interfering with emergency operations and at scenes of ongoing criminal investigations. At such scenes, agency personnel shall ensure media personnel respect the established perimeter. Members of the media have no greater or lesser access to an incident scene than members of the general public.
 - (c) A member of the PIO Team, with approval of the scene commander, may grant closer access to news personnel and their equipment to the degree that it does not interfere with law enforcement operations.

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- (d) No member of this agency shall prohibit the media from news gathering activities, including photography and interviews, outside the established perimeter.
 - (e) News media representatives shall not be prevented from access to any area solely because of the possibility of their injury or death. If this is the only consideration, the media representative should be advised of the danger and allowed to make the decision to enter on his/her volition.
 - (f) Information at crime scenes and critical incident scenes shall be released by a member of the PIO Team, unless another person is delegated as described above.
 - (g) At critical incident scenes, members of the PIO Team or scene commander should consider establishing a media briefing area as close to the scene as safety and operational requirements allow.
 - (h) At critical incident scenes, members of the agency should work in close cooperation with the media to ensure that live broadcasts do not disclose any information that could endanger law enforcement personnel or the general public.
 - (i) Whenever the presence of media aircraft poses a threat to the public or in any way compromises or hampers an ongoing police operation, the on- scene commander should consider a request for a Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR). All TFR requests should include specific information regarding the perimeter and altitude necessary for the incident and should be requested through the appropriate Air Traffic Control Tower. If the appropriate control tower is not known, the Federal Aviation Administration should be contacted (Federal Aviation Regulation § 91.137).
 - (j) Accommodating the news media at planned and unplanned tactical operations should be handled in the same manner as crime scenes.
 - 1. To protect officers and other persons, advance information about planned actions of 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 prior approval of the Chief of Police.
- (f) Access to Suspects: Suspects or accused persons in custody shall not be posed by any member of this agency, and shall not be made available for media interviews, except as described in 346.4(b)(1), above.
- (g) Joint investigations/Other Agency Involvement: In multi-jurisdictional situations, the lead investigative agency is responsible for providing or coordinating the release of public information. 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. Unless otherwise directed by the Chief of Police, under no circumstances should any member of this department make any comment to the media regarding a law enforcement incident not involving this

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department. In cases when another agency assumes primary investigative jurisdiction of an incident involving the Union City Police Department or its employees, media inquiries should be deferred to the agency with jurisdiction unless otherwise directed by the Chief of Police. If an exception is made, any public statement intended for release by the Union City Police Department should be vetted in collaboration with the investigating agency so there is no negative impact to the integrity of the case.

346.3 MEDIA REQUEST FOR PUBLIC RECORDS

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Any member of the public, including members of the media, may request access to unrestricted records of this Department by submitting to an authorized employee a separate written and signed request for each individual and specifically identified record sought (Government Code § 6253). Requests from involved individuals, their authorized representatives and other agencies are addressed in further detail in the Records Release and Security Policy.

346.4 MEETINGS WITH THE MEDIA

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Reaffirming this agency's commitment to positive media relations, the agency head and members of the PIO Team should meet on a regular basis with media representatives to discuss issues of mutual interest or concern. Proposed or anticipated changes in department policy or procedures dealing with the media also will be addressed at this time.

346.6 MEDIA RIDE-ALONGS

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Media personnel may ride along with on-duty police employees only if approved by the Chief of Police. Those so authorized shall abide by all provisions of the agency Ride Along Policy, including the completion of the standard liability waiver. There are, however, additional restrictions applicable to members of the media regarding their access to private property and confidential information potentially encountered during a ride-along.

- (a) Media personnel who accompany Union City Police Department personnel are prohibited from accompanying police employees into areas that are not accessible to the public - specifically areas wherein officers gain access due to their authority as peace officers, including but not limited to homes, dwellings, backyards, ambulances, or any area where a reasonable expectation of privacy exists.
- (b) Officers shall not in any way negotiate or facilitate any waiver or consent for media personnel to accompany them into private areas. Waivers of liability are the equivalent of a business contract entered into by the media and occupants of the premises and shall not be part of the police function.
 1. Without a waiver, which is in most cases impractical for news personnel to acquire without interfering with emergencies or unfolding circumstances, officers shall ensure media personnel observe only from areas accessible to the public.

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346.7 LIVE COVERAGE AGREEMENTS

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Live coverage agreements establish voluntary guidelines for the broadcast of live pictures or information emanating from critical incidents scenes such as hostage situations, barricaded subjects, and other ongoing crises. This agency supports the creation, implementation and use of such agreements.

346.8 REVISIONS

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Procedure Adopted: August 29, 2018