

## DEKALB POLICE DEPARTMENT

Subject: **Media Relations**

Policy #: **306.2**

Effective Since: 8-21-03

Originally Issued As: General

Order # 5 of 10-20-00

Revision Effective: 1-1-19

FTO

Training Task: # 8

Reference Material: NA

ILEAP Standards Covered: ADM.22.01-22.03

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**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this policy is to establish procedures for the release of information to the media concerning departmental activities or public safety issues.

**POLICY:** It is the policy of the DeKalb Police Department to ensure accessibility of information and reports of daily police activities by media representatives. Members of this department will strive to maintain a cooperative relationship with members of the media recognizing that an informed public is a cornerstone of any democratic society. The department will conduct its informational practices according to this policy, statutory law, and the mandates of the courts.

**DEFINITIONS:** none

**PROCEDURE:**

### **I. Authority and Responsibility**

- A. The Chief of Police or his designee has the ultimate authority to prepare and disseminate news releases.
- B. Sergeants are authorized to provide general information regarding ordinary cases to members of the media. Release of information regarding pending investigations, personnel, special operations, or sensitive topics should be referred to a Commander, or released only upon approval by a Commander or above.
- C. Division Commanders are authorized to act as the Public Information Officer, to prepare and disseminate news releases, and to further coordinate the release of information to the media, particularly for newsworthy items under their command. [A-C, ILEAP ADM.22.01(a)]
- D. Command staff responsibility will include but is not necessarily limited to the following activities:
  - 1. Assist news personnel by providing information regarding routine news stories, including at the scene of incidents. [ILEAP ADM.22.01(b)]
  - 2. Prepare and distribute official department news releases. [ILEAP ADM.22.01(c)]
  - 3. Arrange for and assist at news conferences. [ILEAP ADM.22.01(d)]
  - 4. Serve in an on-call capacity around the clock to respond as needed to major incidents generating significant media or public interest. [ILEAP ADM.22.01(e)]
  - 5. Coordinate and authorize the release of information concerning victims, witnesses, and suspects. [ILEAP ADM.22.01(f)]
  - 6. Coordinate and authorize the release of information concerning ongoing department investigations and/or operations. [ILEAP ADM.22.01(g)]

### **II. Information Release Guidelines**

- A. All information released to the media shall be made in accordance with this policy and any withholdings of information will be for reasons exempted by the Freedom of Information Act.
- B. Information requests that pertain to other agencies or city departments shall be referred directly to the applicable agency or department. This requirement shall not be used to avoid or defeat media access to information that is within the purview of the department.

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- C. Information involving the department may be released according to guidelines set forth in this policy unless such release would negatively affect other agencies in the performance of their duties.
- D. In the event the department has participated in a mutual effort or investigation, the other participating agency or agencies should be contacted to facilitate a joint press release. If no press release has been made, supervisors handling a media inquiry should facilitate a discussion with the other participating agency or agencies to ensure any release of information is acceptable to them and will not conflict with any other ongoing efforts or investigations. [ILEAP ADM.22.01(h)]
- E. If the city Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is activated in response to a major disaster impacting the City of DeKalb, all media contact will be made as outlined in the Emergency Preparedness Plan or as directed by the Commander of the EOC.
- F. Supervisors should respond to requests by the media in a timely fashion.
- G. When contacted by a member of the news media, a member of this department may ask for proper identification or credentials prior to releasing any information or allowing access to any restricted areas. If necessary, confirm the employment of the media member by contacting their employer directly.
- H. Nothing in this policy shall preclude an employee from participating in any legislative, administrative or investigative hearing, or supersede any more restrictive rule governing the release of information concerning juvenile or other offenders.

### **III. Information Eligible for Release**

**The following information may ordinarily be released unless otherwise exempted by Freedom of Information Act :**

- A. The fact that an incident occurred, such as fire, accident, homicide, or burglary.
- B. The location, date and time, injuries sustained, damages, and a description of how the incident occurred. The approximate location (hundred block, apartment complex, etc.) will be used for sex crimes and other sensitive investigations.
- C. The amount and type of property taken, including value when known; except specific amounts of USC taken in burglaries or robberies.
- D. The sex, race, and age of the victim except in sex-related incidents or if the victim is a juvenile. Consideration should be given to the victim's wishes in any case.
- E. Casualty figures once confirmed.
- F. The facts and circumstances of arrest, including the names of adults arrested, time and place of arrest, resistance, pursuit, and use of weapons.
- G. The fact that a juvenile has been taken into custody, including sex, age, and substance of the charge.
- H. Numbers of officers or people involved in an event or investigation and the length of the investigation.
- I. An arrestee's name, age, residence, description, occupation, and marital status.
- J. The substance or text of the charge contained in a complaint, warrant, or indictment.
- K. Amount of bond, scheduled court dates, and place of detention.
- L. The scheduling or result of any stage in the judicial process.
- M. Requested assistance in obtaining evidence, locating witnesses, locating suspects or missing persons, and publishing the description of such.

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**IV. Information NOT Eligible for Release . The following information is exempted by the Freedom of Information Act and may not be released without the approval of the Chief of Police or his designee :**

- A. Any information concerning litigation, complaints, charges, or other action pending against any personnel attached to the Department.
- B. The prior criminal record of a defendant.
- C. The identity of any victim in a sex-related crime.
- D. The identity, testimony, or credibility of any actual or potential witness.
- E. Any opinion as to the defendant's guilt or innocence.
- F. Any information surrounding any juvenile's personal information that is involved in an investigation, incident, or arrest other than previously specified in this policy.
- G. The identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to the notification of next of kin. Notification of next of kin of deceased persons and release of identity shall be done in conjunction with the office of the Coroner.
- H. Investigative information and/or information of a confidential or sensitive evidentiary nature.
- I. A specific cause of death until released by the Coroner.
- J. Contents of suicide notes.
- K. Personal opinions not founded in facts.
- L. Comments on pending legislation, controversial topics, or political issues.

**V. Procedures for Media Releases**

- A. Official department media releases are commonly prepared and provided to the media for the following incidents:
  - 1. Major felonies or significant incidents or arrests.
  - 2. Traffic accidents involving multiple serious personal injuries or a fatality.
  - 3. Any other information or incident in which the Division Commander, Deputy Chief or the Chief of Police determines that the most appropriate method of announcement is the press release.
- B. Unless prepared directly by the Chief or Deputy Chief, the appropriate Division Commander or their designee shall be responsible for the preparation of any press release.
- C. All media releases should be checked and double-checked for accuracy and grammatical errors. It is recommended to have a person other than the author review the information prior to release.
- D. If employees other than command staff are authoring a media release, a Division Commander or above shall review and approve the release and dissemination.
- E. Every media release will contain the name and telephone number of department personnel who the media may contact for additional information.
- F. A master file of all department media releases will be maintained by the office of the Chief of Police.
- G. Media releases are ordinarily disseminated through electronic means.
- H. When appropriate, media representatives from the area newspapers, radio, and television stations may be specifically notified of official media releases.
- I. Press releases may also be utilized to officially release newsworthy information concerning promotions, retirements, projects, programs, or other activities of the department.

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- J. Supervisors may also release public safety information or alerts on social media outlets and automated alert systems, subject to current internal rules and procedures regarding such release.
- K. The department utilizes an electronic system for media access to general police reports and activity logs.

### **VI. Media Conferences**

- A. Department media conferences will be conducted in either the Police Department Training Room or the City Hall Council Chambers, or other areas as determined by the Chief of Police or their designee.
- B. The Chief of Police or their designee shall be the official department spokesperson at all media conferences.
- C. The assigned Division Commander will coordinate and be present at all media conferences unless otherwise directed by the Chief of Police.

### **VII. On-Site Media Access**

- A. The media may be permitted access to the perimeter of crime scenes, major fires, natural disasters, and other catastrophic events. The supervisor in charge at the scene should be prepared to designate the physical perimeter and be aware of any safety hazards.
- B. Media admissions into crime scenes will not ordinarily be permitted. In certain cases, this may be allowed upon approval by the Chief, and only after investigators have completed their examination of the premises and the entry will not interfere with a vital law enforcement or public safety function. Any such admission will be performed in accordance with the Illinois Compiled Statutes. [ILEAP ADM.22.02]
- C. Access to scenes occurring on private property will be restricted unless permission is granted by the owner, agent of the owner, or tenant.
- D. Members of the media may be permitted to conduct ride-alongs with officers or investigators upon permission by the Chief or Deputy Chief.
- E. Members of the media will be permitted to photograph accident or incident scenes from the scene perimeter, or officers performing their duties, as long as their actions do not interfere with emergency services, the performance of police duties, or the flow of traffic.
- F. Civilians shall remain outside posted police lines unless specifically admitted.
- G. If warranted, the department may designate a specific on-scene area for the news media designated media liaison will be available to answer questions and release statements.

### **VIII. Policy Development**

- A. Media representatives are encouraged to participate in the process of improving procedures relating to the news media and make recommendations to the Chief or Deputy Chief to improve the existing media relations policy.
- B. Supervisors are authorized to provide a copy of this policy to media representatives upon request.
- C. It is the department's intent to maintain a good rapport with the news media and to develop a professional and viable working relationship.

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- D. Members of the DeKalb Police Department are encouraged to be open, honest, cooperative and as courteous as possible to members of the media consistent with this policy.

**Policy originally issued 8-21-03; this revision becomes effective on 1-1-19 by authority of the Chief of Police.**

NOTE: This policy and procedure summarizes the department's position on this specific matter. This policy is for general direction and guidance primarily designed for use by the department's members. This policy is for internal use only and does not create or enlarge an officer's liability in any way. This policy shall not be construed as the creation of a higher standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party claims. Violations of this policy, if proven, can only form the basis of an internal departmental complaint and then only in a non-judicial administrative setting.