



GREENVILLE COUNTY
SHERIFF'S OFFICE

GO - 115

GENERAL ORDERS

Media Relations

PURPOSE:

Positive media relations are necessary to keep the public informed of current events and situations occurring in the community. The Public Information Office is responsible for providing the media with timely, accurate information.

PROCEDURE:

Personnel authorized to release information and make official statements on criminal investigations:

1. Sheriff
2. Chief Deputy
3. Majors
4. PIOs

In the event media representatives request call information during after-hours, Captains, Lieutenants, Platoon sergeants acting as shift commanders and the Dispatch Supervisor (or the designee in the Supervisor's absence) may release the following information:

- Incident location
- Type of call
- Generic injury description

Information that may be released:

- Type of incident/crime.
- Location, time, injuries sustained, damaged incurred.
- An arrested, and/or formally charged person's:
 - Name (identity of juveniles under eighteen not released unless charged with an A through D felony and charged as an adult)
 - Age
 - Address
 - Phone number
 - Date of birth
 - Information surrounding their arrest so long as the information does not compromise the integrity of the investigation or court proceedings.
- Length of Investigation, if it will not compromise an undercover investigation.
- General information related to the finding of physical evidence, such as weapons or proceeds of a crime.
- Issuance and service of a search warrant.
- Descriptions of suspects that could lead to the identification and arrest.

- Fugitive cases may require wide publicity. The circumstances and facts in each case will be the controlling factors in deciding to publicize or not to publicize the case.
- If a Sheriff's Office employee resigns while he or she is subject of an internal investigation, that fact may be released.
- Sheriff's Office personnel involved in traffic collisions.
- Names of deputies fatally injured, only after notifying the next of kin.
- Names of deputies involved in officer involved shootings, only at the conclusion of SLED and the Solicitor's Office's investigations.
- Dash cam footage
- Body cam footage only by the Sheriff, or his designee, and at the Sheriff's discretion.

Information that **MAY NOT** be released:

- Information that can jeopardize successful conclusion of an investigation.
- Identity of juveniles (under eighteen years of age, unless charged with an A through D felony and charged as an adult).
EXCEPTION: Missing, runaway or a juvenile who is in danger or presents an imminent threat to the public or themselves.
- Identity of witnesses or informants.
- Identity of victims.

In some cases victims publicize incidents on their own free will, making their identity public knowledge, and in these cases, a victim's identity may be confirmed or not confirmed.

In death investigations, a victim's identity may be made only after the identity has first been released by the coroner's office.

- Existence of statements, admissions, or confessions by suspects, victims, or witnesses.
- Results of examinations or tests, or refusal by accused to take them.
- Non-conviction data.
- Amount of money taken in criminal incidents.
- Suspect's driver's license numbers and social security numbers.
- Reasons for a member of this office resigning.
- Comments on pending civil litigation or comments on resolved civil litigation if the comments would violate a court order or state and/or federal law.

AGENCY**RESPONSIBILITIES:**

1. If the Sheriff's Office is the primary investigating agency, the Sheriff's Office is responsible for making releases and statements.
2. If the Sheriff's Office is assisting another agency that is the primary investigation agency, the Sheriff's Office shall refer inquiries for information to that agency. This office may release information pertaining to independent action taken during the investigation.
3. When the Sheriff's Office is conducting a criminal investigation jointly with other agencies, a spokesperson will be appointed to release information concerning the investigation through a prearranged agreement among all agencies involved.

NEWS RELEASES:

Press releases are to be formulated and disseminated on an as-needed basis. Subjects for release include announcement of new services or programs, Sheriff's Office incidents, official statements and conclusions of investigations. All area news media agencies are to be included in any distribution of news releases to ensure equal access. No media outlet will be denied access to a media release if they can provide proper credentials.

SOCIAL MEDIA:

In law enforcement, communication is key and social media can be a useful tool to assist in providing and gathering valuable information to and from the public when it comes to criminal activity. In addition, social media is also utilized as a community outreach tool to share information.

The Public Information Office administers the social media platforms and may use such platforms to provide and gather information to and from the public as it relates to matters concerning the Sheriff's Office. In addition, social media may be utilized to disseminate information to the public from a community outreach standpoint. All requests for social media posts must come through the Public Information Office.

CRIME SCENES:

The following are guidelines related to the media and active crime scenes:

1. At any large-scale crime scene, or one of long duration, the Public Information Officer shall respond to facilitate media activities.
2. When access into a crime scene is restricted, after properly identifying themselves, media personnel are to be granted access into the outer perimeter. Proper identification is defined as a valid media identification card issued by their agency.
3. In public places and places where the press may otherwise lawfully be, no member of this Office is to take any action to prevent or interfere with the news media in photographing or televising an event, a suspect, an accused or any other person or thing. The exception to this is when the presence of a camera crew could compromise the integrity of an investigation.

4. Members of this Office are not to deliberately pose a suspect or accused in custody to be photographed, televised or interviewed.
5. When a member of the media refuses to cooperate with deputies at a crime scene, the Public Information Officer is to be informed of the circumstances and the nature of the complaint. The PIO will then follow up on the complaint with the news agency concerned. Conversely, when a news media representative has a complaint concerning a deputy's actions at a crime scene, the PIO is to be informed of the circumstance and is to follow up on the complaint with the appropriate division commander. The PIO will then reply to the concerned news agency in a timely manner.

TRAINING:

Employees assigned to public information duties will receive training.

**FREEDOM OF
INFORMATION****ACT:**

This policy is designed to comply with all State and Federal Freedom of Information Laws. The Sheriff's Office legal division is responsible for fulfilling **FOIA** requests. The legal division will cooperate with the PIO regarding FOIA requests in order to keep all personnel informed of relative information.



Hobart Lewis, Sheriff