

Georgia Department of Public Safety Policy Manual

SUBJECT MEDIA RELATIONS	POLICY NUMBER 15.01
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15.01.1 Purpose

It is the purpose of this policy to establish guidelines for release and dissemination of public information to print and broadcast media as well as on the Georgia Department of Public Safety (DPS) website.

15.01.2 Policy

It is the policy of the Department to cooperate fully and impartially with media representatives in their efforts to gather factual, public information pertaining to activities of the department, as long as these activities do not unduly interfere with departmental operation, infringe upon individual rights or violate the law.

15.01.3 Definitions

- A. Public Information - Information that may be of interest to the general public regarding policy, procedures or events involving the department or other newsworthy information that is subject to disclosure, does not unduly interfere with the mission of the department, infringe upon the rights of any individual or compromise the legitimate safety and privacy interests of department employees, victims, witnesses or others.
- B. Media Representatives - Those individuals who are engaged in the dissemination of information through the electronic or print media such as radio, television and newspapers.
- C. Public Information Officer (PIO) - The department's PIO serves as a central source of information for release by the department and responds to requests for information by the media and the community.
- D. Field Public Information Officer (FPIO) - Those persons who hold the rank of TFC or higher who have been designated by the Post/Unit Commander to act as the Post/Unit liaison to the media in the assigned Post/Unit area.

15.01.4 Procedures

- A. Whenever practical, media releases shall be coordinated by or through the Post/Unit NCO. The Departmental Public Information Office will assist as necessary.

1. Duties of the PIO. The department's PIO is available to:
 - a. Assist media personnel in covering routine stories, and at the scenes of incidents;
 - b. Act as "point person" when requested, to coordinate joint-agency-response to media inquiries at incident scenes involving multiple jurisdictions;
 - c. Coordinate availability of uniformed members for print and on-camera media interviews and community appearances;
 - d. Routinely conduct on-camera, print and radio interviews when uniformed members or DPS command staff are not available;
 - e. Establish and maintain professional working relationship with the state's major media outlets and professional journalism organizations;
 - f. Assist the media on an on-call basis;
 - g. Prepare and distribute news releases, and media advisories;
 - h. Develop timely and targeted media releases, PSA's, fact sheets, talking points and promotional items for dissemination to FPIO's;
 - i. Receive and answer media open records requests in coordination with Legal Services;
 - j. Arrange for, and assist at, media conferences;
 - k. Upon request, research and write timely and topical talking points and speeches for the Commissioner;
 - l. Work with local, state and national highway safety offices and law enforcement agencies to coordinate statewide driver safety campaigns;
 - m. Assist and support Department recruitment campaigns;
 - n. Coordinate production of Department videotape projects;
 - o. Coordinate the release of information about victims, witnesses and suspects;
 - p. Coordinate the release of authorized information concerning agency investigations and operations, and
 - q. Assist with agency crisis management operations.
2. Duties of the FPIO. The department's FPIO is available to:
 - a. Establish and maintain professional working relationship with media representatives in territory;
 - b. Furnish available information, as permitted by law and department policy, to media representatives. Where the FPIO is unsure of the facts or the propriety of releasing information, they shall refer the inquiry to the PIO or their Post/Unit Commander;

- c. Disseminate and promote media releases or other information developed by PIO to local media representatives;
- d. Be available to conduct interviews about Department related concerns with local media representatives;
- e. Assist media representatives, as approved by the PIO, who may be covering an event/story in their territory;
- f. Act as the "point person" for traffic safety or other Department related campaigns;
- g. Maintain positive public information efforts with other law enforcement agencies in their territory;
- h. Forward local media stories, when available, to the PIO;
- i. Participate in pre-approved speaking engagements;
- j. Assist personnel in dealing with media representatives;
- k. Furnish local travel conditions during inclement weather or hazardous driving conditions, and
- l. Assist with recruitment efforts on the local level.

3. Cooperation with the Media

- a. Media representatives shall have reasonable access to the PIO, the Commissioner of the Department of Public Safety, or his designee, and public information regarding the operations of the department as governed by this policy. When information cannot be disclosed to a media representative, the basis for that denial shall be explained in a professional manner.
- b. This department recognizes identification from all local, national and international media organizations. Failure of media representatives to present identification may provide grounds for restricting access.
- c. Public information shall be released to the media as promptly as circumstances allow, without partiality and in an objective manner.
- d. Public information may be provided to media representatives by telephone if the identity of the representative is known or can be authenticated.
- e. The officer in charge at crime or incident scenes may release information of a factual nature to the media as governed by this policy or refer the inquiry to the PIO. Where the officer is unsure of the facts or the propriety of releasing information, they shall refer the inquiry to the PIO.
- f. Written press releases/statements shall be issued only following approval of the Commissioner of the Department of Public Safety, or his designee.
- g. The Troop Communications Center shall maintain up-to-date contact numbers and inform the PIO as soon as possible upon receipt of information about events or activities that may have media interest.

- h. The NCO/Supervisor on call shall be responsible for ensuring their chain of command and the PIO are informed of events that may have media interest as soon as possible. Headquarters civilians shall notify their Division Director who shall be responsible for notifying the PIO.

4. Special Considerations—Criminal Matters

- a. Departmental personnel shall extend every reasonable courtesy to media representatives at crime scenes. This may include closer access to personnel and equipment than available to the general public to the degree that it does not interfere with the law enforcement mission or the movement of traffic.
- b. Media representatives shall not be allowed access to any area or scene of an incident or crime where there is a possibility that evidence may be damaged, altered, destroyed or otherwise prejudiced by its existence being published or portrayed. Once evidence has been processed, removed and secured by the department, media representatives may be allowed to enter by permission of the lead investigator or appropriate supervisor.
 - 1) Access to private property requires the permission of the owner or the owner's representative.
 - 2) Suspects or accused persons in custody shall not be posed or arrangements made for photographs, telecasts or interviews, nor shall departmental personnel pose with suspects or accused persons in custody.
 - 3) When an individual is charged with a criminal offense and is sought by law enforcement authorities, photographs may be released to the media to help locate the individual. No departmental photographs, videotape, film or composites of subjects in custody shall otherwise be released to the media unless authorized by the Commissioner of the Department of Public Safety or his designee.
- c. At the scene of major crimes, such as hostage and barricade situations, or civil disorders, the officer in charge shall designate a preliminary press area as early as safety and operational requirements allow.
- d. The fact that a suicide has occurred may be reported to the media, along with factual information describing how it happened. The name, age, address, and sex of the victim may also be released following notification of next of kin. The fact that a suicide note exists may also be acknowledged without further comment. The content of such notes is personal and confidential and shall not be released except as provided by law.
- e. Upon request, statistical reports of criminal activity, in the form and content they are routinely used in the course of normal operations, shall be made available to the media.

5. Special Considerations—Noncriminal Matters

- a. At the scene of significant accidents, man-made or natural catastrophes, the principles of media cooperation shall be maintained to the degree that they do not interfere with the mission of public safety officials.

- 1) Media representatives should be provided access to areas that have been determined to be reasonably safe by public safety personnel. Such access may be extended as operations render additional areas essentially free of hazard.
- b. Sensitive information relating to ongoing internal DPS investigations or pending administrative disciplinary measures shall not be released without the permission of the Commissioner of the Department of Public Safety or his designee.
- c. Information that has the potential to compromise the public's health, safety or welfare shall not be released without prior review and approval from the Commissioner of the Department of Public Safety or his designee.