
	Griffin Police Department		
	Standard Operating Procedures		
	TITLE: Chapter 29 Public Information/Media Relations		
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Approved:  Michael F. Yates – Chief of Police			

29.1.1 PUBLIC INFORMATION POLICY

It is the policy of the Griffin Police Department to cooperate fully and impartially with the news media in their efforts to gather and disseminate factual information that is consistent with established procedures and where such activities do not subvert the ends of justice, infringe upon individual rights or privacy, or upon individual rights to a fair and impartial trial.

The following is considered public information and may be released to the public:

1. Arrestee's:
 - a. Name
 - b. Alias
 - c. Age
 - d. Sex
 - e. Race
 - f. Occupation
 - g. Address
 - h. Police Department ID number (case number)
 - i. Physical condition
2. Name of arresting officer
3. Date and time of arrest
4. Booking information
5. Charge
6. Court in which case is filed

7. Summary of arrest
8. Notation of any release or transfer
9. Bond amount
10. No other information about the arrestee will be released unless approved by the Chief of Police or designee.

29.1.2 PUBLIC INFORMATION FUNCTION

The Griffin Police Department will cooperate with the news media in giving them information in which they have expressed interest about the department's operations, as well as about situations for which the department wishes to generate interest. To satisfy this requirement, the department will:

- Assist news personnel in covering routine news stories, and at the scene of incidents;
- Be available for on call response to the news media;
Prepare and distribute news releases relating to departmental activities;
- Arrange for, and assist at, news conference;
- Coordinate and authorize the release of appropriate information about victims, witnesses and suspects;
- Set up liaison and assist the media in crisis situations;
- Coordinate and authorize the release of information concerning confidential departmental investigations and operations as soon as such release becomes appropriate.

29.1.3 RESPONSIBILITY FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION FUNCTION

The Public Information Officer will have the following responsibilities:

- Coordinate and release information from agency files to the local news media;
- Inform all local News media of changes in policy or procedures concerning the release of information or media access;
- Encourage local news agencies to participate in the formulation of information policy;
- Provide local news media with updated news releases policies and procedures;
- Assist news personnel in covering routine news stories and make arrangements for or assist at news conferences.
- Coordinate with public information contact of other agencies

involved in incidents with this department for media release;

29.1.4 MEDIA REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

Routine Inquiries: Major cases and unusual events which generate a great amount of media interest will be handled by the Public Information Officer. (**NOTE:** Officers needing advice, counsel, or public information assistance at an incident scene are urged to request it. Such requests should be made by telephone rather than by voice radio.)

Special Request: Requests for information from specific department employees which may be considered background, statistical, documentary, or of a special or feature nature will be directed to the Public Information Officer. News representatives making such requests may be referred by the appropriate supervisor prior to making the information request.

Members of the department may not use department resources (personnel or equipment) to perform special research projects or to gather extensive data in response to media requests for information not normally available to the department. However, personnel may suggest sources for the information requested.

News Releases, Features, Announcements: Responsibility for planning, developing, writing and distributing information and articles about the program and activities of the department and its members rests with the Chief of Police.

Press releases shall be prepared as required by the Public Information Officer and distributed to local Newspapers and radio and television.

Newsworthy information concerning promotions, projects, programs or other activities should be forwarded in writing in advance of effective dates, or by telephone when time doesn't permit or there is an urgent need to release the information.

The subject matter in press releases shall conform with guidelines described in this policy.

Contact person: Media representation shall contact the Public Information Officer when necessary to verify an occurrence, time, date and location.

29.1.5 **AUTHORIZATION TO RELEASE INFORMATION TO NEWS MEDIA:**

Other than the Public Information Officer, the following personnel may release information to the news media under the stated conditions:

- At the scene of an accident: Shift Supervisor, if there is no fatality involved.
- From agency files: Chief of Police or Supervisor.
- Concerning an ongoing criminal investigation: Chief of Police.

29.1.6 **ACCESS OF CREDENTIALLED NEWS MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES:**

General Access at Crime or Incident Scene: Members of the department shall extend every courtesy to properly identified news media reports and photographers actively covering an incident at the scene. These courtesies shall permit closer access than that granted to the general public, and shall provide for vehicles and equipment to be located closer, so long as such does not interfere with either the mission with the traffic flow. Also, where there is the danger of personal injury, access shall be restricted until the officer in charge determines the area is safe.

Direct Access at Crime Scene. Direct access by media personnel shall be allowed only after all known evidence has been processed and the on-site investigation has been completed. This restriction is necessary to preserve the integrity of the scene. Once such integrity has been insured, media mobility will not be restricted.

Hostage, Barricade situations. In hostage or barricade situations, the officer in charge shall designate a preliminary press area immediately upon arrival at the scene and may establish it closer to the scene when it has been determined that it is safe to do so.

Release of Information. Information may be released at the scene of an incident only by the Public Information Officer. In emergency incidents, media representatives should be directed to the Shift Supervisor who shall either release appropriate information or direct media representative to the officer in charge or media liaison.

At Fire Scenes, Disaster Scenes. Media access to, and movement within, fire lines at commercial and residential fire scenes is controlled by the fire officer in charge. When news media arrives at such events, the

ranking police officer on the scene shall confer with the fire commander in charge and assist in establishing an observation point for the media.

Photography, Television Recording by News Media in Public Places.

News media representatives shall be allowed to freely photograph or videotape at the scene of any incident so long as their activity does not significantly interfere with an investigation or its prosecution is neither compromised nor jeopardized. Officers may take protective measures such as covering a body, to prevent photographing or televising if such actions are deemed necessary by the officer in charge.

Photographing, Televising by News Media of Suspects, Accused Persons.

Suspects or persons in custody shall not be deliberately posed for photography, telecasts or interviews. Neither shall department members pose themselves with a suspect or accused, nor enter into any agreement to have a suspect or person in custody at a prearranged time and place to be photographed or interviewed. No action shall be directed against the news media to prevent or impede their lawful right to photograph such persons at incident scenes or in other public places.

Interviewing Persons in Custody. News media representatives will not be permitted to interview persons in custody.

Confidential Internal Investigations. Confidential intelligence or investigative information from Criminal Intelligence will not be disclosed without the express permission of the Chief of Police. Sensitive or investigative information concerning an internal investigation (particularly the identity of officers involved) will not be disclosed by the internal affairs investigator except by express permission of the Chief of Police or his designee.

Suicides. The fact that a suicide has occurred may be acknowledged, along with factual information describing how it happened. The name, address, age, sex, and occupation of the victim may also be released after notification of next of kin. The fact that a suicide note exists may also be acknowledged, without further comment. Contents of all such messages are considered personal and confidential and shall not be made public.

Citizen's Request to Withhold Information. Should a citizen request that information on an incident not be released or reported to the media, officers will explain that crime information is generally considered public information and therefore available to the news media. Officers will also explain that such a request will be noted in the official report on the incident. Once so noted, the decision to public unrestricted information about the event shall be left to the media.

29.1.7 MEDIA PARTICIPATION IN POLICY

The contents of this General Order shall be furnished to local media representatives, including all Amendments. Local news agencies are invited and encouraged to participate in the formulation of policy as it pertains to the Department's relationship with the media.

29.1.8 RELEASE OF INFORMATION TO NEWS MEDIA

Information of interest to the news media falls into two general categories: Arrest information and following regulations prescribe what may and what shall not be released to the media:

- Arrest information which **shall not** be released refer to SOP 29.1.9
- Arrest information which **may** be generally be released; refer to SOP 29.1.10
- Investigative information which **shall not** be released; refer to SOP 29.1.2
- Investigative information which **may not** be released; refer to SOP 29.1.12
- Investigative information which **may** generally released; refer to SOP 29.1.3

29.1.9 ARREST INFORMATION WHICH SHALL NOT BE RELEASED

The following arrest information shall not be released; by the Chief of Police or his designee in order to aid an investigation or warn the general public.

1. After an incident but before arrest, or during investigation:

DO NOT RELEASE

- Identity or location of any suspect;
- Results of an investigative procedure such as a lineup, polygraph, fingerprinting, lab or ballistics test. (The fact that tests are performed may be acknowledged without further comment.)

- Information which, if prematurely disclosed, would significantly interfere with an investigation or apprehension, particularly unchecked leads; unverified information; specifics of "Mo"; details known only to a suspect or officer; information may cause a suspect to flee or avoid apprehension.
 - Identity of a prospective non-victim witness
 - Identity of a victim/witness if such disclosure would prejudice an investigation to any significant degree, or if it would plea the victim in clear personal danger.
2. After an arrest and formal charging, but prior to adjudication, certain information is restricted to ensure constitutional guarantees of a fair and impartial trial. Improper disclosure could form the basis for a legal defense.

DO NOT RELEASE

- Prior to criminal record, character or reputation of a defendant.
- Existence or contents of any confession, admission, statement of defendant, or the failure to make such.
- Performance or results of any test, or a defendant's refusal or failure to submit to investigative tests such as a polygraph and other types.
- Identity, creditability, character, statement(s) or expected testimony of any witness, or perspective witness.
- Statement(s), prospective testimony, character, or creditability of any victim.
- Any opinion about the guilt or innocence of a defendant, or the merits of the case, including arguments and evidence or whether their use in court is expected.
- Possibility of a guilty plea, plea bargaining or other dispositions.
- Reports, transcripts, or summaries of proceedings from which the press and public have been excluded by judicial order.

29.1.10 ARREST INFORMATION WHICH MAY GENERALLY BE RELEASED

Some arrest information may be released at the time of or immediately following formal charging:

- Accused name, age, description, residence, employment, marital status (except juveniles).
- Substance or test of the charged as contained in a complaint, warrant or indictment.
- Identity of the investigating and arresting officer(s), or agency and the length of the investigation. (Exception-identity of undercover officers will not be released.)
- Circumstances immediately surrounding an arrest including (a) time and place of arrest; (b) method of apprehension; (c) resistance and resulting injury; (d) possession and use of weapons by suspects; and (e) items of contraband seized.
- Amount of bond, scheduled court date, place of detention.

29.1.11 INVESTIGATIVE INFORMATION AUTHORITY TO RELEASE

Investigative information shall not be released except by the Chief of Police, Criminal Investigations Division Commander, or his designee. When investigative information is released, the Chief of Police shall be notified as soon as possible.

- Identity of any victim of a sex crime, abduction, spouse or child, or related information which, if divulged, would tend to lead the victim's identity.
- Identity of any juvenile under the age of 17 who is a suspect or a defendant in any case over which the Juvenile Court of Spalding County has jurisdiction.
- Identity of any critical injured or deceased person prior to the notification of next of kin. (**Exception** will be when notification has been attempted but is not possible within a reasonable time as determined by the Chief of Police.)
- Specific cause of death until determined by a competent medical examiner.
- Investigative information and information of an evidentiary nature.

- Contents of suicide notes.
- Personal opinion not found in fact.
- Unofficial statements concerning personnel or internal affairs matters.
- Home address and telephone numbers of members of the Griffin Police Department.
- Valuable or cash overlooked by crime perpetrators.
- Amount of money taken in a robbery.

29.1.13 INVESTIGATIVE INFORMATION WHICH GENERALLY BE RELEASED

Investigate information which may be released is applicable only to cases over which the Griffin Police Department has primary responsibility and jurisdiction. In investigations where there is a mutual effort by the Griffin Police Department and another agency and the other agency has primary responsibility, the other agency (state or federal) will determine guidelines and control the release of information.

Unless otherwise indicated, the following types of information may generally be released:

- Type or nature of an incident such as fire, accident, homicide, suicide, rape, robbery, assault or burglary.
- Location, date, and time, injuries value when know, except money taken in a robbery.
- Identity and general address of a victim. (See SOP 29.1.12)
- Casualty figures, to include known dead or injured.
- Name, age and address of any adult charged with a crime.
- Amount and type of property taken, including value when known, except money taken in a robbery.
- The fact that a juvenile has been taken into custody, including sex, age, general area of residence, and substance of charge.
- Requests for aid in locating evidence, a complainant or a suspect.

A person's race may be released as descriptive information in such cases.

- Number of officers, or people, involved in an event or investigation and the length of the investigation.

29.1.14 MEDIA ACCESS TO DISASTER INFORMATION

Media access to disaster scenes shall be controlled by the on site Supervisor or Civil Defense Director. In the absence of the Supervisor, media access will be limited to the on-scene command post.

29.1.15 INFORMATION TO BE PROVIDED TO THE CHIEF OF POLICE IN A TIMELY MANNER

To insure professional handling of the news media, the Chief of Police shall be notified of newsworthy events prior to being contacted by the media if at all possible. The information must be timely, accurate and should contain no suppositions or conjectures. The "Who-What-When-Where and why?" should be conveyed by the Shift Supervisor, Investigator or their designee either during or immediately following the incident.