



LINCOLN POLICE DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDERS

NUMBER: 1160
TOPIC: MEDIA RELATIONS
ISSUED BY: JEFF BLIEMEISTER, CHIEF OF POLICE
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SUPERSEDES: G.O. 1160, 2016
REFERENCE: G.O. 1940

I. POLICY

The Lincoln Police Department is committed to informing the news media of events that are of public interest and community concern with openness and candor. Information released in criminal cases will conform to the Nebraska bar-press guidelines.

II. PROCEDURE

A. Employees Authorized to Release Information

1. Records Unit personnel may release public record information to the news media, consistent with General Order 1940.
2. Public record incident reports for news media inspection are available on line.
3. Officers of any rank may release limited information at the scene of incidents, consistent with the guidelines in this General Order, however, requests for information shall be referred to a supervisor when one is present at the scene.
4. Officers of supervisory rank may release information concerning ongoing or completed criminal investigations, consistent with the guidelines in this General Order.
5. Officers of any rank may release certain information pertaining to current calls for service to the news media, consistent with guidelines in this General Order.

B. Public Information Officer(54.1.1)

1. A public information officer is assigned within the Education and Personnel Unit.
2. The public information officer shall:
 - a. Assist news personnel in covering stories at the scenes of incidents;
 - b. Be available for on-call responses to the media;
 - c. Prepare and distribute news releases;
 - d. Coordinate news conferences;
 - e. Coordinate and authorize release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects;

- f. Assist in crisis situations within the agency;
 - g. Coordinate and authorize the release of information concerning confidential agency investigations and operations;
 - h. Conduct weekday press briefings;
 - i. Maintain liaison with news organizations.
 - j. Maintain the departments Social Media accounts.
 - k. Provide guidance and train other officers who post on our twitter account.
3. Duty commanders will be the contact for media during non-business hours.

C. Guidelines for Release of Information

1. General Information

- a. Press releases are coordinated and distributed through the public information officer. A copy of the release will be maintained by the public information officer and forwarded to the duty commanders and the chief of police.
- b. Information about department programs, special projects, and other general information may be released by the appropriate commanding officer or unit manager.
- c. Press conferences will be scheduled by the public information officer at the direction of the chief of police. All local media will be notified to ensure equal access to information.
- d. Matters of department policy or issues which require interpretation or explanation of written directives shall be referred to the chief of police.

2. Information about Current Incidents

- a. The location of a crime, traffic accident, or incident may be released upon inquiry, unless there is a danger of injury or contamination of the scene.
- b. The location of crimes in progress, hazardous incidents, and SWAT calls shall not be released until a press area has been established. The duty commander will determine at what point

in time the news media may be advised of the location, and asked to report to the designated press area.

3. Information at the Scene of Incidents
 - a. A brief, factual description of the incident may be released by officers at the scene.
 - b. More detailed information may be released only with supervisory authorization.
4. Information About Criminal Investigations
 - a. Officers of supervisory rank may release information about ongoing or completed criminal investigations, when the release of information will not interfere with any continuing investigation.
 - b. Generally, the following types of information concerning a criminal investigation may be released, however, in homicide and other death cases the release of such information shall be coordinated with the chief of police:
 - (1) Arrested persons' names and biographical information;
 - (2) The offense alleged in any arrest;
 - (3) Victims' names and biographical information, except:
 - (a) Names of deceased victims shall be withheld until family notification has been made;
 - (b) Care should be taken when releasing information about sexual assault and incest cases with respect to the victim's identity;
 - (4) The length of the investigation, and number of personnel involved;
 - (5) A brief description of the circumstances of any arrest, including time, place, whether resistance or pursuit occurred, possession or use of any weapons;
 - (6) The description of a suspect. Ordinarily, the name of a suspect shall only be released when a warrant has been issued and public assistance is needed for apprehension. In the event that a suspect represents an immediate threat to public safety, the suspect's name and identifying information may be released even if a warrant has not yet been issued.

D. Information Which Should Not be Released

1. Opinions concerning the guilt, innocence, or character of an arrested person, or concerning the identity, credibility or

anticipated testimony of prospective witnesses;

2. Statements predicting or influencing the outcome of a trial;
3. Results of any examination or tests, or the refusal or failure of a person to submit to such procedures;
4. The existence or contents of any confession or statement;
5. Information specific to the offense that could only be known by the perpetrator, or information that may cause the suspect to flee;
6. Detailed information concerning testimonial or physical evidence, the release of which might prejudice the right of the defendant to a fair trial.
7. Employees should not volunteer the prior criminal records of an accused, except when this is necessary to aid in his apprehension or to warn the public of any dangers the accused presents.

E. Photographs

1. Mug shots are public information, and may be released to the media.
2. Employees shall not deliberately pose a person in custody for photography or televising by the media.
3. Employees shall not interfere with unposed photographing or televising by the news media except when the photographing or televising would interfere with official duties.

F. Access to Incident Scenes(41.2.4, 54.1.3)

1. Although the department will strive to provide reasonable assistance to the news media in reporting news, access to the scenes or surroundings of incidents may be restricted when necessary in order to:
 - a. Protect the scene;
 - b. Prevent exposure to clear hazards.
2. Officers needing to establish such restrictions should:
 - a. Inform any media personnel of the restricted area and purpose of the restriction;
 - b. Designate a suitable area for media access that provides the least restriction necessary to accomplish the purpose.

G. Coordination of Information Releases with Other Agencies(54.1.1)

1. Requests for information about cases or incidents not involving the department should be referred to the agencies involved.

2. When multiple agencies are involved in incidents, the agency having primary jurisdiction should coordinate the release of information to the media.