	Alexandria Police Department Directive 10.21	

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND MEDIA SERVICES

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CONTENTS

10.21.01 PURPOSE AND POLICY
10.21.02 PROCEDURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
10.21.03 SERIOUS INCIDENTS AND NEWSWORTHY EVENTS
10.21.04 RELEASE OF SPECIFIC INFORMATION
10.21.05 NEWS MEDIA ACCESS
10.21.06 COORDINATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES
10.21.07 DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS INVOLVING SOCIAL MEDIA
APPENDIX A. PHOTOGRAPH/IMAGE DENIAL OF PERMISSION FORM

10.21.01 PURPOSE AND POLICY

The purpose of this Directive is to establish procedures for the release of information to the news media.

It is the policy of this Department to:

- Provide accurate, timely information to the public through the news media about incidents and Departmental events affecting the community;

- Keep confidential, information which is protected by statute, or the release of which would adversely affect criminal investigations or the well-being of any victims involved;

- Maintain a cooperative working relationship with the news media and include them in the development of changes in policies and procedures relating to the

public information function. **[54.1.2]**

10.21.02 PROCEDURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES [54.1.1.a - h]

A. The provisions of this directive apply to all official information including; major incidents, records, complaints, statements of Departmental policy, and publicity for Department events. Statistical information is covered in Police Directive 10.7C, Release of Statistical Information.

B. Authority to release official Department information of any type is limited to: the Chief of Police, the Public Information Officers (PIO), and others who may be specifically designated as information releasing authorities. Except as provided elsewhere in this directive, no employee is to release any official information without specific prior authorization from one of the information releasing authorities named in this directive.

C. A copy of ALL public correspondence (defined as any document or report prepared by a Department employee for official purposes and dissemination outside the Department) must be forwarded to the PIO for informational purposes prior to being released to the public. Preferred method of delivery is via email, electronically scanned, or hard copy via interoffice mail.

D. The PIO serves as the primary point of contact for news media representatives. The duties of the PIO include, but are not limited to:

1. Assisting news personnel in covering routine news stories and at the scenes of incidents;

2. Being available for on-call responses to the news media;

3. Preparing and distributing Department news releases;

4. Arranging for, and assisting at news conferences;

5. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects;

6. Assisting in crisis situations within the Department;

7. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential investigations and operations;

8. Maintaining on-call availability for major incidents and crises involving the Department;

9. Developing procedures for releasing information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort; and

10. Acting as primary source for release of information to the City Manager's Office.

E. Information releasing authorities may give and/or authorize interviews concerning Department matters. Employees will not give interviews with the media without proper authorization from an information releasing authority identified in this directive. After an interview is given, the information will be forwarded to the PIO. Oral notification is satisfactory when the Public Information Office is staffed. At other times, a written message or a page will be sent to the PIO.

   The PIO may request employees with first-hand knowledge of a particular Department activity to provide that information to the media. While employees are encouraged to comply with such requests, no employees will be expected to provide information to news media representatives against their will, unless they fulfill one of the specifically assigned responsibilities defined in this directive.

F. Anyone desiring to publicize or promote a particular program or item of interest will coordinate such release through the Public Information Office.

G. A Department of Emergency Communications (DEC) supervisor or designee will page the PIO at the request of any news media representative requiring the assistance of the PIO.

10.21.03 SERIOUS INCIDENTS AND NEWSWORTHY EVENTS

A. The PIO will be notified of all serious incidents in a timely manner. The PIO will be notified of any incidents upon the request of the Incident Commander. In addition, the PIO will be notified whenever the City Manager's Office is notified of an incident, or when the City Manager's Office initiates a request for information about an incident.

B. All Patrol Commanders and DEC Supervisors (or those acting in such capacities) will notify the Public Information Office of all events within their purview likely to attract media attention, or which require notification of the City Manager's Office, including phone inquiries or on the scene coverage.

C. The Criminal Investigations Crimes Against Persons Section Commander or Supervisor will notify the PIO in a timely manner about the occurrence of any homicide or the arrest of any homicide suspects.

D. The PIO will release information to the media on all serious incidents. Information may be provided at the incident scene, by phone, or by means of a written news release. Information regarding ongoing investigations being conducted by CIS will be reviewed and approved by a CIS Commander before release to the media.

E. In the absence of the PIO at an incident scene, the scene commander will, if possible, provide a brief synopsis of the situation to any news media representatives on the scene. If time permits, the presence of the PIO may be requested.

F. If a serious incident occurs when the PIO is not available, the Incident Commander is responsible for the official release of information. A commander of CIS must first approve any information which is released regarding an on-going investigation. If a written news release is provided, the original release will be forwarded to the Public Information Office and a copy to the City Manager's Office at the time of dissemination.

G. Patrol Commanders or designees will release current routine information to the news media outside regular business hours (0800 to 1700 hours, Monday through Friday) and on holidays. Any questions as to what may be released will be resolved by consulting with the PIO or other information releasing authority, as defined in this directive.

   It should be noted that the PIO generally does handle all media inquiries regardless of the time of day. This applies only to those rare incidents where there is no PIO available. Otherwise, all media inquiries should be referred to the PIO.

H. A DEC employee receiving a media inquiry about an incident in progress will refer the news media representative to a DEC supervisor. A DEC supervisor or designee will provide the following information: "There is a reported (incident) at (location). It (has/has not) been confirmed and no other details are available at this time."

   The DEC supervisor will also advise the person calling to contact the PIO (either by calling the direct number or by using a pager number if the media representative already has it).

I. DEC employees may read official written releases or statements provided by the PIO or Incident Commander over the phone in response to media inquiries.

J. DEC supervisors or designees will provide timely information regarding traffic conditions to inquiring news media representatives.

K. The following assessment criteria will be taken into account when considering public dissemination of police incidents:

1. Is the incident at a City facility or involve a city employee?
2. Does it involve Alexandria City Public Schools?
3. Has a command page been issued?
4. Does the incident involve serious injury?
5. Should the public be notified for safety reasons?
6. Is there community interest due to a crime trend?
7. Is a helicopter in use for a police incident?
8. Does this jeopardize the case by releasing investigative information?

L. The PIO will notify the Office of Communications and Public Information **by phone** when information of an operational nature is going to be released to the public. The Office of Communications and Public Information is responsible for notifying the City Manager's Office and City Council.

M. Information about police operations will be released through Facebook, Twitter, eNews, and the Police Department's website when applicable.

1. Notification to Public List (general)

a. Homicides/Suspicious Death,
b. Felonious Assault (resulting in serious injury),
c. Stranger Sexual Assaults,
d. Fatal Accidents,
e. Missing/endangered child or senior citizen,
f. Hostage/barricade situation,
g. Officer-involved shooting,
h. "Shots fired" calls-with evidence of a crime,
i. Usage of a helicopter, and
j. Robberies.

2. Notification to City Manager's Office

a. All the above, along with:
b. City Employee arrest, and
c. Significant injury of an Officer.

10.21.04 RELEASE OF SPECIFIC INFORMATION

A. Information in this section may be released with discretion, depending upon circumstances affecting a criminal investigation. Information will not be restricted solely for its newsworthy value. No information, other than that listed below, will be released until the facts are corroborated with the Commonwealth's Attorney.

B. The PIO or other information releasing authority may release information in the following categories:

1. Time, date and location of an offense (block number only for residences), and general facts relating to the crime;

2. General information concerning the scope of the investigation, provided it would not hinder the investigation or eventual prosecution;

3. The name, age, gender and hometown of a deceased victim after the next of kin has been notified;

4. The age, gender and hometown of a witness or surviving victim;

5. The age range, gender, and physical description, including racial or ethnic background, and approximate height and weight, of an unidentified suspect;

6. The suspect's name, age, gender, residence and occupation (unless the suspect is a juvenile, in which case the age, gender and hometown of the suspect will be released), providing an arrest has been made, a warrant issued or an indictment returned. If the suspect has not been arrested, but a warrant has been issued or an indictment returned, such additional information as is necessary to assist in apprehending the suspect or to warn the public of any dangers presented by the suspect's being at large, may be released as needed;

7. A booking photograph of a suspect unless to do so would hinder a criminal investigation by this Department or another law enforcement agency;

8. The fact of an arrest and the circumstances immediately surrounding it, including the location, date and time of arrest, any pursuit or resistance involved, the use of any weapons (general type of weapon), the identity of the arresting and investigating officers, and the length of the investigation;

9. The nature, substance or text of any charge, including a brief description of the offense (except that in sex crimes, the offense may only be described as rape, felony sexual assault or misdemeanor sexual assault, as appropriate);

10. The fact of any seizure of physical evidence (except a confession, admission, or statement), at the discretion of a Criminal Investigations commander and/or the Commonwealth's Attorney, or a request for assistance in obtaining evidence relative to the case;

11. The scheduling, result or any status in the judicial process;

12. Any information contained in a public record (e.g., executed search warrants filed with a Court);

13. The general type of weapon used and the nature of any injuries sustained, except for the specific location and exact number of wounds;

14. The date and results of an autopsy, including manner and cause of death;

15. The name, age, gender, rank, current assignment, number of years of service with the Department, and employment status of an officer who, while on-duty or while working an off-duty detail, has used deadly or other force against a subject;

16. The name, age, gender, rank, current assignment and number of years with the Department of an officer who has been killed while on-duty or while working an off-duty detail, after the next of kin has been notified; or

17. The name, age, gender, rank, last assignment, number of years with the Department, and employment status of any employee arrested by this Department.

C. Information in the following categories <u>will not</u> be released to the public:

1. The name and address of a bereaved relative of a homicide or fatal accident victim unless such relative requests publicity;

2. The identity of any surviving victim of or witness to a crime or accident unless the victim or witness gives permission to be publicly identified and doing so will not compromise an ongoing investigation;

3. The identity of a deceased victim when the next of kin has not been notified;

4. The identity of any suspect for whom a warrant has not been issued or an indictment not returned;

5. The existence of any prior criminal record or any information concerning the character or reputation of a suspect;

6. The existence or contents of any confession, admission, or statement of the suspect;

7. The performance in any examination or test of the suspect, or the refusal or failure to submit to an examination or test;

8. Comment on the expected testimony or credibility of any victim or witness;

9. Any opinion to the suspect's guilt or innocence, the merits of the case, the possibility of any pleas or negotiations, or the probative value of any evidence;

10. The existence or contents of any suicide note;

11. The amount of money taken in a robbery, except in general terms such as "a small amount" or "less than $50;"

12. Names of juvenile suspects or juvenile escapees;

13. There are exceptions to this confidentiality found in **Code of Virginia §16.1-309.1,** that allow the court and/or the Commonwealth's Attorney to release identifying information (e.g., photograph and name) if a serious juvenile offender escapes from a detention center or if such information is necessary to assist in apprehending a juvenile suspect or to warn the public of any dangers presented by the juvenile suspect being at large;

14. Exact addresses in residential crimes;

15. The name of anyone who has attempted suicide unless that person is a suspect in criminal activity;

16. Home addresses or phone numbers of Department employees;

17. The details of any internal investigation without the approval of the Chief of Police;

18. Department's reaction to any lawsuit naming the Department or its employees; or

19. Audio tapes of phone calls or radio transmissions from DEC operation.

D. ***Practices for Body Worn Camera and In Car Camera Releases:***

1. ***Faces and names of suspects, subjects, complainants and officers should generally remain unredacted.***

2. ***Faces and names of victims and juveniles should be redacted.***

3. ***Suspects/subjects who become deceased should be redacted at the point they incur the mortal injury or death.***

4. ***The Department may deviate from these guidelines when deemed necessary based on the individual situation or set of circumstances.***

E. Requests by the victim or next of kin for exceptions to the above provisions may be granted, but only if doing so will not negatively affect an on-going investigation. The Commonwealth's Attorney will be consulted before seeking the approval of the PIO or Chief of Police.

F. Information will not be intentionally withheld or released prematurely to give one news media organization unfair advantage over its competitor. The PIO will maintain a current list of major media representatives to provide for effective notification.

10.21.05 NEWS MEDIA ACCESS [54.1.3.a. & b.]

A. All employees of the Department will extend every courtesy to news media representatives who are actively covering an incident at a scene; i.e., major fire, natural disaster, or other catastrophic event. This may include closer access to the scene or special parking accommodations for news media vehicles. These courtesies should not be permitted if they interfere with police operations or control. Crime scene perimeters must be securely maintained. No member of the media shall be allowed access inside a crime scene, major fire, natural disaster, or other catastrophic event scene without the permission of the on-scene commander, and then only when accompanied by the PIO, Scene Commander, or his/her designee.

B. Employees of this Department will take no action to either discourage or encourage the media in photographing or televising anything within their view at any police scene. This includes, but is not limited to, the photographing or televising of evidence or of a suspect being taken into custody or being transported. Media camera crews will not be permitted any closer access than any other media representatives. If a crime scene encompasses private property, permission from the owner(s) or their representatives must be obtained when photographs, films, videotapes or other recordings are to be taken on or inside the area of private ownership.

C. No Department employee will unnecessarily obstruct news media representatives in the performance of their duties; however, media representatives are in no way exempt from State, Federal or City laws.

D. Restrictions on news media representatives will be based only on the responsibilities and principles contained herein and not on an individual employee's view of what constitutes an acceptable standard of journalism or news photography.

E. Police officials have no standing to invite news media representatives into private premises without the consent of the owner or the person in charge of the premises.

F. Police officials are not permitted to ask property owners for such consent on behalf of the news media. Media representatives must identify themselves as such to private property owners and must secure authorization directly from the owner or person in charge of the premises to enter private property.

G. News media representatives are permitted on ride-alongs with prior approval of the PIO and the Sector Commander of the employee coordinating or providing the ride-along. The employee providing the ride-along is responsible for providing the PIO with a copy of the signed Media Ride-Along Release (APD-159D). Police officials and news media representatives must abide by the same policies outlined in Police Directive 12.5, Ride-Along Program.

H. News media representatives are not permitted to accompany police officials inside any property during the execution of a search warrant, arrest warrant or tactical operation.

I. News media representatives are not permitted to interview persons in police custody. Following incarceration, any such arrangements are the responsibility of the Sheriff's Office.

J. News media representatives at an incident scene, but outside a restricted area, are not required to display or produce media credentials to be present or to receive information. Police officials may only request media credentials at an incident scene if they have reason to question the actions of a person claiming to be a news media representative.

K. Permission to enter a restricted area will not be considered until the news media representative produces a valid media pass or is positively identified by the PIO.

L. Any employee who removes or issues orders to remove a news media representative from an incident scene must notify the PIO of the media representative's identity, the circumstances for the removal and if known, the location of the representative.

M. The Incident Commander is to notify the PIO immediately if the presence of a news media helicopter at an incident scene is interfering with police communications of any kind, including radio transmissions. The PIO will then contact the news media outlet whose helicopter is present and request that the helicopter move to a location where it does not interfere with police communications or incident operations.

N. Any employee having a complaint regarding the conduct of any news media representative should forward the complaint, in writing, to the PIO. The PIO will review the incident, forward the complaint to the Chief of Police for appropriate action, if necessary, and inform the employee of the action taken.

O. Any news media representative having a complaint regarding the conduct of an employee of this Department may bring it to the attention of the PIO. The PIO may bring the complaint to that employee's supervisor or, if warranted, to Internal Investigations.

P. No employee of this Department will pose as a news media representative for the purpose of conducting an investigation or for any other purpose.

10.21.06 COORDINATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES

A. When an incident or other police issue involves another City, State or Federal agency, the PIO will coordinate the release of information with that agency. In instances where this Department does not have primary jurisdiction and is assisting another agency, responsibility for the release of information rests with the agency having primary jurisdiction. If the agency with primary jurisdiction is unable to coordinate the release of information, this Department's PIO will assume responsibility at the request of that agency.

B. The City of Alexandria Emergency Operations Plan and the Incident Command System will govern the release of information to the media in major disasters or long-term incidents that involve other City departments.

10.21.07 DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS INVOLVING SOCIAL MEDIA

A. All Alexandria Police Department sponsored social media sites or pages shall be approved through the Chief of Police or his designee by the Office of Communication and Public Information and administered by the Public Information Office.

B. The Public Information Officer shall serve as the Department's Social Media Coordinator and will:

1. Develop the means to provide real-time, accurate, medium-appropriate updates using social media outlets; and

2. Be responsible for the maintenance and monitoring of public social media postings and content.

C. Except for those persons assigned to an undercover position, all current employees of the Alexandria Police Department agree to allow the Department to use their image in the media.

D. If an employee chooses not to have their image used, he/she must complete a Denial of Permission (APD-546) form and submit it to the Public Information Office.

E. When photographs are being taken at an event, it is the employee's responsibility to request the Public Information Officer (or other Department representative taking photographs) not to include him/her in the photo.

   Except for the Vice and Narcotics Commander, the option of not having their photograph taken does not apply to command-rank employees where their photographs depict them attending meetings or otherwise conducting Department business.

F. Officers assigned to an undercover assignment shall submit a Denial of Permission (APD-546) form to the Public Information Office immediately upon their assignment to an undercover position.

By Authority of:

Raul Pedroso
Chief of Police, Interim

Alexandria Police Department
Photograph/Image Denial of Permission

Employee Name: _____ ID Number: _____

Department/Division Name_____ Sworn ☐ Civilian ☐

As an employee of the Alexandria Police Department, I wish to make the following election concerning the use of my photograph/image in the media by representatives of the Alexandria Police Department:

_____ In accordance with PD 10.21.07C, I agree to allow representatives of the Alexandria Police Department to use my photograph/image in the media. The photograph/image may be used with or without my name and for any lawful purpose, including for example such purposes as news releases, publicity, illustration, and Web content. I understand that all negatives, prints, and digital reproductions shall be the property of the Alexandra Police Department.

_____ In accordance with PD 10.21.07D, Public Information and Media Services, I choose not to have my photograph/image used in the media by the Alexandria Police Department. I understand that when photographs or recordings are being taken at an event, it is my responsibility to request the Public Information Officer (or other Department representative taking photographs) not to include me in the photo and/or recording.

_____ In accordance with PD 10.21.07E, Public Information and Media Services, I am assigned to an undercover assignment and request that my photograph/image not be used in the media by the Public Information Office or any other Department representative.

Upon completion, this form is to be submitted to the Public Information Officer.

Signature of Employee: _____ Date:_____

Signature of Supervisor: _____ Date:_____

F-APD-546 (06/2018)