

EAST LANSING POLICE DEPARTMENT

POLICY AND PROCEDURE

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CHIEF OF POLICE: _____



25.1 POLICY

It is the policy of the East Lansing Police Department to maintain an open and honest rapport with the public and the news media.

25.2 PURPOSE

To set forth policy and procedures which will guide personnel in dealing with the media and releasing information.

25.3 PROCEDURE

The East Lansing Police Department has established a duty assignment in the Administrative Division designated as the department's **Public Information Officer (P.I.O.)**. The P.I.O. is charged with the responsibility of the public information function and news media relations. The P.I.O.'s duty is to develop and maintain a cooperative relationship between the East Lansing Police Department and the news media, which will facilitate information dissemination to the public. The P.I.O. provides accurate and timely information to news media representatives regarding crime, police activities and related matters.

25.4 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals and objectives of the P.I.O. include improving police community relations by increasing public awareness of police service and criminal activity. A better understanding of the police department is a key element to improving public support and cooperation.

25.5 FUNCTIONS PERFORMED

The P.I.O. prepares press releases on major crimes, major incidents, or unusual events involving the police department. The press release is distributed through upper levels of the department command. Media inquiries shall be referred to the shift supervisor if the P.I.O. is not available. Incidents necessitating the initiation of a press release may require the P.I.O. to contact various news media representatives.

- A. TELEPHONE INTERVIEW: The majority of routine information dissemination contacts with representatives of the various newspapers, radio and television stations are accomplished by telephone as the need arises.
- B. TELEVISION INTERVIEW: The television interview is a media responsibility of P.I.O. The television interview may concern breaking news, a feature story, or follow up information, including soliciting viewer-witness assistance.
- C. MAINTENANCE OF PRESS RELEASE AND NEWS ARTICLE FILES: The P.I.O. maintains a file of issued news releases. The P.I.O. also maintains a file of newspaper articles from the various newspapers having regular contact with the Department. This file aids in monitoring the amount of publicity a given incident receives and documents the P.I.O. activities for future reference.
- D. FEATURE STORIES: The P.I.O. should actively promote feature stories which focus on the functions of all units within the East Lansing Police Department. Objectives of the feature story program are multi-fold, including educating the public and morale building within the Department. The P.I.O. acts as the liaison and coordinator between police personnel and the media representatives.
- E. NEWS CONFERENCES: The primary responsibility for coordinating news conference functions is assigned to the P.I.O.

25.6 INFORMATION RELEASE GUIDELINE

- A. Preparation of a formal release is a primary duty of the P.I.O. The release should include basic information on an incident, addressing who, what, when, where and how. The P.I.O. works directly with the Communications Department on releases.
 - 1. The identity of victims, witnesses or any involved parties who may be endangered by publicity should be avoided as much as discretion will allow. These persons are generally identified by sex, age and city of residence only.
 - 2. The identity of the victim of any fatal incident shall be withheld until the identification and notification of family process has been completed. Prior to completion of the process, victims will be identified by sex, age and city of residence only.
 - 3. The identity of an arrested adult suspect shall be withheld until after arraignment. Information released after the arraignment shall include the arraignment date, the arraigning authority's name and title, list of charge(s), bond amount, plea(s) entered, preliminary examination date, and the name of the institution where the suspect is being held. The suspect will be identified by name, age and city of residence. Prior to arraignment, the suspect will be identified by sex, age and city of residence only.
 - 4. The identity of an arrested juvenile suspect shall be withheld. The juvenile

suspect will be identified by sex, age, and city of residence only.

5. In most incidents, identities of drivers and passengers involved in a motor vehicle accident may be released after the accident report has been completed. The identity of the responsible driver should be withheld in situations where criminal prosecution is likely. The names of persons who are injured in a motor vehicle accident should also be withheld until next of kin has been notified.
6. Names of officers involved in department activity may be released to the media, except in situations when disclosure would be inappropriate; i.e., an officer's safety or an investigation would be jeopardized.
7. An incident which requires the issuance of a press release may require updating as the situation develops. A thorough follow up of an incident provides the news media with the complete story and promotes media confidence in the P.I.O.
8. Photographs of adult suspects may be released to the media, upon their request, after arraignment.
9. Complete identity and photographs of suspect(s) who are not in custody, but for whom warrants have been issued, may be released to the media particularly where media assistance and publicity will serve to assist law enforcement agencies in apprehending the suspect and alerting the public.
10. Copies of incident reports will not be provided to the news media representatives except in compliance with a Freedom of Information Act request or court order.

B. The East Lansing Police Department will not release the following information:

1. The prior criminal record, character, or reputation of the accused, unless the release of information will serve a law enforcement function for apprehension.
2. The existence of any confession, admission of guilt, statement made by the accused, or refusal by the accused to make a statement.
3. The results of any examinations of tests conducted, or refusal by the accused to submit to any examinations or tests.
4. The identity, testimony, or credibility of any prospective witness.
5. Any opinion of agency personnel regarding the guilt or innocence of the accused.
6. Any opinion of agency personnel regarding the merits of the case or quality of evidence gathered.
7. Information received from other law enforcement agencies without their concurrence to release that information.

C. Information regarding investigations and other police activities normally considered to be newsworthy or of public interest, and which may be released to the media, will be

conveyed to the P.I.O. in a timely fashion.

- D. Bureau Commanders or Shift Commanders or PIO Designee, will assume the responsibility for formal information release to the news media in the absence of the P.I.O.
- E. Media inquiries regarding matters involving extensive criminal investigation, traffic accident follow up, etc., will be referred to the appropriate Division Commander when the P.I.O. is unavailable.
- F. The P.I.O. may respond to the scene of incidents which command major coverage.
 - 1. Any officer may respond to media inquiries at the scene of an incident when duties allow. The officer should respond in brief, advising the media as to the type of situation; e.g., shooting, assault, number and type of casualties, sex and age of victims if known, and number of effected arrests. Information that would preempt proper notification of next of kin or that would jeopardize prosecution efforts must be avoided.
- G. When incidents involving the East Lansing Police Department and other public service agencies occur wherein the other agencies have primary jurisdiction, the responsibility for information release will be referred to that Agency.
- H. When mutual law enforcement effort occurs, information release will be coordinated with representatives of the respective law enforcement agencies.
- I. Any officer who releases information to the media, other than an official Department press release, shall, as soon as practicable, inform the P.I.O. regarding the nature of the information released.