



# University of Wisconsin–Madison Police

**Policy: 54.1**

**SUBJECT: PUBLIC INFORMATION**

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## **POLICY:**

The University of Wisconsin–Madison Police Department shall establish policies and procedures for the release of information to the community and the media. The Department is committed to informing the community and news media of events that occur within the public domain. The right of access to law enforcement information is important and must be accomplished within legal parameters and in accordance with Department procedures.

## **DEFINITIONS:**

“Media” refers to radio, television, newspapers, magazines, blogs, and other means of communication that reach or influence people widely.

## **PROCEDURE:**

### **54.1.1 PUBLIC INFORMATION FUNCTION**

The following procedures shall guide Department public information-related activities:

- A. The Day Shift Patrol Sergeant is the Public Information Officer (P.I.O.) coordinator and is responsible for connecting media requests with Department personnel able to respond to the request.
- B. The P.I.O. Commander is the Day Shift Lieutenant
- C. Command staff may designate P.I.O.’s to assist in providing an organized means for dissemination of information to the public.
- D. A copy of any press release issued by a person other than the P.I.O. coordinator shall be forwarded to the coordinator.
- E. Duties associated with the public information function include preparing and distributing news releases, interacting with media personnel, coordinating the release of information and other media activities with University Communications, reviewing public information policies, and coordinating news conferences. Responsibilities of the public information function shall include (with appropriate management authorization):
  - 1. Assisting media personnel in covering news stories at the incident scene.
  - 2. Preparing and distributing agency media releases.
  - 3. Arranging for, and assisting at media (press) conferences.
  - 4. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects.
  - 5. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential agency investigations and operations.
  - 6. Developing procedures for releasing information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort.

### **54.1.2 PUBLIC INFORMATION POLICY INPUT**

The following procedures shall govern the involvement of the media in the development of changes in policies and procedures related to the public information function:

The Day Shift Patrol Sergeant shall be responsible for involving media agencies in the development of changes in policies and procedures related to the public information function. Allowing news media representatives to participate in the policy and policy review process helps foster a cooperative working relationship between entities and provides an opportunity for Department personnel to receive valuable input regarding this important function.

### **54.1.3 MEDIA ACCESS**

The following provides procedures for on-scene media access:

- A. Access by news media representatives, including photographers, shall be controlled at crime scenes, traffic collisions, and scenes of disasters, or other catastrophic events. Access shall be allowed within the limitations of public safety, civil rights restrictions, and crime scene integrity.
- B. Once an incident scene perimeter has been established, news media personnel shall not be permitted inside access without officer escort. The Department shall designate a specific area for news media personnel within proximity of the incident. University Communications staff shall be consulted and serve in a liaison capacity.

### **54.1.4 PUBLIC INFORMATION EMPLOYEE GUIDELINES**

The following shall govern the use of media expeditors and other personnel during the public information release process:

- A. Those persons designated as P.I.O.'s shall receive P.I.O. training.
- B. Patrol shift supervisors should be trained as P.I.O.'s and are responsible for monitoring shift activities, preparing initial press releases, and accommodating media requests in accordance with established directives and the State of Wisconsin public records laws. Shift supervisors may delegate tasks to trained P.I.O.'s working on their shifts.
- C. University Communications will not serve as the P.I.O. for the Department unless requested. Personnel releasing information to the media, in most circumstances, will inform University Communications prior to informing the media.
- D. Police communications operators may verify initial information such as type of incident, location, and emergency personnel on-scene, to the requesting media. They may also release written statements prepared by a P.I.O. Requests for additional information from the media that come through the communications center shall be directed to the police officer in charge or the designated P.I.O.
- E. Any employee working with the media should inform the P.I.O. coordinator or the Day Shift Lieutenant to ensure consistent information in a coordinated Department response. An employee who identifies what he or she believes to be a newsworthy item should contact the Day Shift Lieutenant or the P.I.O. coordinator regarding its release.

### **54.1.5 NEWS RELEASE GUIDELINES**

The following shall govern news release and media interview guidelines:

- A. News releases shall be prepared in accordance with Department policy and State of Wisconsin open records laws. A copy should be saved in the shared network drive.
- B. When the immediate incident prevents a P.I.O. from preparing a written release, the media may be given initial incident information verbally or via email. In a critical incident, a P.I.O. shall be assigned to a command post, if formed, and the decision to release information will involve command personnel.
- C. When a crime occurs that could potentially impose an ongoing threat to the University, a press release or other appropriate form of communication must occur to make sure the community receives timely warning of the threat (refer to Appendix F). A copy of the press release shall be provided to the Field Services Captain, P.I.O. coordinator, to the Day Shift Lieutenant, and placed in the case file.