



SYKESVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Public Information

General Order 7-3

Effective: 08/28/17

Authorized by: *Michael A. Spaulding* Chief of Police

I. PURPOSE

To provide the procedures by which information is to be managed and disseminated to the public and media.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Sykesville Police Department to closely observe the right of the community to be informed through print, broadcast, digital and social media of events occurring within the community that are handled by or involve the Police Department.

III. PROCEDURES

A. Sykesville Police Department Commitment

The public's perception of any organization stands or falls upon the impression it creates through day to day contacts with its personnel. The Sykesville Police Department is committed to fostering a cooperative relationship with the community it serves through open communications and shall release information of interest to the public. Through strict control and release of information, the Office shall foster a relationship of mutual trust, cooperation, respect, and professionalism. Every contact made by employees of this Office can be measured in terms of public relations.

B. Function

1. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that press releases are completed for incidents which occur during their shift and that those incidents are brought to the attention of the Chief of Police.
2. It is the responsibility of the Chief of Police to ensure that the information regarding the activities of the Police Department is made available to the media and the public.
3. It is the responsibility of all Office personnel, sworn and non-sworn, to cooperate with those that gather and report the news, within the limitations and restrictions contained herein.

C. Assignment and Duties

1. The Chief of Police may designate other Sykesville Police Department personnel to act as the Office's public information officer when appropriate or necessary.

2. The Chief of Police will conduct or coordinate all major news releases and media conferences.

D. Frequency of Dissemination of Information to the Media

The Chief of Police will determine the frequency and content of the media releases in consultation with the Group Supervisors. Information shall be released to the media when it becomes available and organized, and is determined to be of importance to the media. When the information is ready for release, it shall be disseminated by the Chief of Police or the Administrative Assistant and made available to all media sources on an equal basis.

E. Dissemination of Information to the News Media

1. Under unusual circumstances, the Chief of Police, or his designee, shall prepare press releases for the media. These releases shall avoid statements that could reflect unfavorably on the Office and shall not divulge internal Office business, policy, or any potential or controversial matter without prior permission to do so from the Chief of Police. Personnel will not be impolite or discourteous to members of the media.
2. A public information officer may be temporarily appointed by the Chief and made available during limited hours for routine events and on-call for special events, disasters, and unusual or serious occurrences.
3. Should a serious situation occur that generates a great deal of media interest, the Chief of Police will handle media inquiries. These incidents may include:
 - a. Homicides, kidnapping, robberies.
 - b. Natural or manmade disasters resulting in the loss of life and/or extensive property damage.
 - c. Aircraft disasters, serious/fatal injury traffic accidents, school bus accidents involving injuries.
 - d. Missing persons where foul play is suspected.
 - e. Strikes or demonstrations.
 - f. Shooting by citizens or police.
 - g. Deaths other than from natural causes.

4. News media questions regarding on-going investigations will be handled by the Chief of Police, or State's Attorney's representative.
5. Information relating to internal personnel files and investigations will not be released to the media without prior approval from the Chief of Police, with consultation of the Town Attorney.
6. Anytime a representative of the news media is denied access to certain information, as outlined in this order, that representative will be given a courteous explanation of the reasons for such denial.
7. The Team Supervisors and Chief of Police will coordinate and supervise the release of information when a crisis arises within the agency. Information of a sensitive nature will be released in a timely manner.
8. News releases of a routine nature will be prepared by the supervisor in charge. Press releases will be completed and given to the Chief of Police for his review and release. A copy of a Press Release template is available on the PowerDMS under "forms."
9. All requests for copies of an arrested subject's mugshot photograph will be referred to the Records Section/Administrative Assistant. Each request will be reviewed on a case by case basis by the Records Section to ensure that the release will not hinder an on-going investigation or violate any right to privacy. If no conflict exists, a copy of the arrested subject's mugshot photograph will be released. A notation of the release will be placed in the appropriate file.

F. Guidelines Recognizing or Revoking Media Credentials

1. Employees will not interfere with the lawful activities of the news media at the scene of a crime or other event but will act in accordance with the guidelines of this order. Personnel of the news media at crime scenes or other events will govern their actions by local and state ordinances, regulations and policies of the Sykesville Police Department and the State of Maryland.
2. Any person not associated with a recognized news agency will be asked to leave the scene of a crime or major event. An officer may request official credentials, either in the form of a press pass or employee identification card, from a news person if unsure they are employed by a credible news agency.
3. A member of a news media who has violated the guidelines of this policy may have their credentials or rights to enter a crime scene or major event revoked by the Chief of Police. These rights may be given back to that

representative when it is proven his or her actions will not reoccur. A written memo will be forwarded to the media representative's supervisor describing the unacceptable actions of the news person and the actions taken by the Sykesville Police Department.

G. Actions of the Media at Crime Scenes

1. The on-duty supervisor or Incident Commander will coordinate activities of the media at the scene of a crime or activity that is under the control of the Sykesville Police Department. A crime scene perimeter and a staging area for the news media will be established. A supervisor will be assigned to coordinate the release of information and assist with their requests.
2. The news media will be denied access to these areas/situations listed:
 - a. If the owner of private property requests they be excluded or case law dictates otherwise.
 - b. If there is a possibility that evidence will be damaged, tampered with or removed from the scene of a crime, or the investigation will be hampered.
 - c. During a tactical police operation, if the media's presence would disrupt operations or place a citizen or officer in substantial risk of injury or loss of life.
3. A member of the news media should not be prevented from having access to an area unless he or she will be subjected to the possibility of injury or death. The news media should be clearly advised of the danger by the on-scene officer.
4. The ranking Incident Commander or on-duty supervisor has the authority to restrict access of the news media to crime scenes or tactical situations if in his or her judgment the above guidelines would be applicable or the subject does not possess the proper credentials.

H. Guidelines for Disseminating Public Information

1. In instances where members of the Sykesville Police Department are either actively involved in or have just concluded a police action, care should be exercised before talking with media representatives.
 - a. Members should be aware that their obligation is to the investigation at hand and reports containing important information should be completed before conversing with the media.

- b. Members should confer with supervisors if they have questions as to what information is appropriate to be released concerning a police action.
2. The release of information is subject to restrictions placed by applicable local, state, and federal laws. No member of this agency shall release any information that would hamper the successful conclusion of an investigation or jeopardize the safety of affected persons.
- a. Agency members can release the following information:
 - (1) Basic information about a crime or incident.
 - (2) Basic information about victims, except as excluded by law.
 - (3) Description of suspects.
 - (4) Basic description of weapons and vehicles used.
 - (5) Basic description of stolen items.
 - (6) Basic description of injuries and condition of victims.
 - (7) The name, age, address, and other basic information about arrestees and the charges against them.
 - (8) Information contained in arrest affidavits and other applicable crime or incident reports.
 - (9) Booking photographs.
 - (10) Identification and photograph of a fugitive for whom a warrant has been issued.
 - (11) The criminal background of a fugitive, if the public should be alerted.
 - (12) The name of the officer who is in charge of the investigation.
 - b. Agency members shall not release the following information:
 - (1) Names, addresses, and any other information that would identify the victim of a sex offense, child abuse, or any

other crime where the privacy of the victim is protected by law.

- (2) Names, addresses, and basic information about juvenile arrestees, as governed by state law.
- (3) Active criminal investigative information, active criminal intelligence information, and surveillance techniques.
- (4) Names of informants and information provided by them.
- (5) Supplemental or investigative reports until such time as the case is closed or the lead investigator deems it permissible.
- (6) Grand jury testimony and proceedings.
- (7) Active internal affairs investigations, as governed by state law.
- (8) Names of witnesses, unless required by state law.
- (9) The identity of critically injured or deceased persons prior to notification of next-of-kin.
- (10) Home address, telephone numbers, and familial information of law enforcement personnel.
- (11) Names of undercover personnel.
- (12) Any other information that could jeopardize the successful conclusion of an investigative and prosecution.
- (13) The identity of suspects that are interviewed but not charged will not be released.
- (14) Information on matters that are currently in litigation in the courts.
- (15) Information that may incur liability upon the town.
- (16) Any other information prohibited by state law from public disclosure

c. Other information not to be released:

- (1) Fatal collisions: Every effort must be made in the case of fatal collision investigations to notify a victim's next of kin before the media is informed. If such notification cannot be given within a maximum of eight (8) hours, the reason will be determined and the media advised and requested not to release the victim's name until notification can be made.
- (2) The identity of a suspect prior to arrest, except to the extent necessary to aid in the investigation, to assist in apprehension of the suspect or to warn the public of danger.
- (3) Information that could lead to the identity or specific address of a juvenile.
- (4) Statements concerning the character or reputation of an accused person.
- (5) Existence or contents of any confession or admission given by the accused or his refusal to make a statement.
- (6) Expected content of testimony or credibility of prospective witness.
- (7) Possibility of a plea of guilty to the offense charged or to a lesser offense or other disposition.
- (8) Other statements relating to the merits, evidence, arguments, opinions or theories of the case.
- (9) Information concerning a person's prior criminal record.
- (10) On motor vehicle collision reports where a Juvenile is charged with a violation of the Transportation Article or Article 27, Homicide by motor vehicle, which upon conviction may involve incarceration as all or part of the penalty, all reference to charges shall be purged prior to the release.
- (11) No copies of written reports will be released to the public/media without authorization from the on-duty supervisor or Chief of Police.
- (12) No reports which contain criminal history information will be given to anyone.
- (13) Photographing and Interviewing by the Media

- i. The deliberate posing of a person in police custody for photographing or televising is prohibited. The media does have the right to photograph a person in police custody as long as it is not a posed picture.
- ii. If a suspect is a Juvenile or if undercover police personnel are in jeopardy of being exposed to the media, police personnel must take appropriate steps to ensure that their identity is not revealed. Police personnel should not attempt to interfere with media personnel photographing an actual ongoing event. However, if security or other valid reasons exist, media access may be restricted.
- iii. A person in police custody will not be permitted a media interview.

I. Public Records

This agency and its' members shall abide by all local, state and federal laws governing the release of public records. Town policy regarding the release of public records can be found in General Order 7-4, Freedom of Information Act Requests.

J. Release of Information by Office Members

1. The supervisor that makes a press release will document the content of the material released, and when it was released on the Sykesville Police Department "Press Release" form.
2. Press Release form
 - a. The Press Release form will be completed by the Group Supervisor or chief of Police.
 - b. The Press Release will include:
 - (1) Date and time.
 - (2) Case number.
 - (3) Location of incident.
 - (4) Incident.
 - (5) Authorizing signature.

(6) Narrative.

c. The Press Release will be disseminated in the following manner immediately upon completion:

(1) Copy provided to the Chief, Town Manager and Mayor.

(2) Copy to the Records Section to be placed with the case file.

d. A copy of all Press Releases will be maintained at the duty desk in a Press Release Book. The Press Release Book will be organized chronologically for easy access.

e. Information from witnesses or obtained from other agencies will not be disseminated in a Press Release. Information obtained by other agencies should be released by that agency.

K. Multiple Jurisdictions

In situations where multiple jurisdictions are present (police, fire, medical examiner), the Incident Commander shall devise a plan of coordination and dissemination of information to the news media.

L. Web Page Maintenance

The Sykesville Town Government will maintain a Web Page as a public information tool (www.townofsykesville.org). This valuable media resource is designed to promote the vision, commitment, services and accomplishments of the Sykesville Police Department.

1. The Web Page will be updated frequently based on need or at the Town's direction.

2. All information to be placed on the Web Page (including photographs) will be approved prior to placement on the Web Page. No information will be placed on the Web Page without the written approval. All submissions will be through the chain of command with appropriate endorsements at each level.

M. Police Department Facebook page

The Sykesville Police Department will maintain a Facebook Page as a public information tool. This valuable media resource is designed to promote the vision, commitment, services and accomplishments of the Sykesville Police Department.

1. The Facebook Page will be updated frequently based on need or at the Chief's direction.
2. All information to be placed on the Facebook Page (including photographs) will be approved by the Chief of Police prior to posting on the page. No information will be placed on the Facebook Page without the Chief's approval.
3. All personnel (sworn and civilian) should refrain from commenting on any postings/photographs, etc., on the Department Facebook page, in an official or unofficial capacity unless prior approval is obtained by the Chief of Police. Refer to General Order 11-1, Social Media Policy, for the rules and regulations governing the same.

IV. CANCELLATIONS

This General Order cancels and replaces the following policies: General Order 54.1, entitled Public Information, dated December 26, 2001.