



**Maryland-National Capital Park Police
Prince George's County Division**



DIVISION DIRECTIVE

TITLE MEDIA RELATIONS			PROCEDURE NUMBER PG324.0
SECTION Duties and Responsibilities	DISTRIBUTION A	EFFECTIVE DATE 12/22/16	REVIEW DATE 05/01/21
REPLACES PG324.0 "Media Relations," issued 03/01/04			
RELATED DIRECTIVES PG406.0	REFERENCES CALEA 41, 54, 55	AUTHORITY <i>S.R. Johnson</i> Chief Stanley R. Johnson	

I. PURPOSE

This directive establishes guidelines and responsibility for the release of information to the media. Specific questions regarding this directive should be addressed to the Park Police Division Chief.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of this Division to engage in a positive relationship with the media and the public.

In dealing with the media, officers and staff must be careful to protect the rights and interests of crime victims, the Division, the Department of Parks, and the Park and Planning Commission, particularly with regard to liability and confidentiality. It is important to cooperate and respond as promptly as possible to media requests as such cooperation enhances the Division's reputation for integrity with the news media.

This directive has been written consistent with the Maryland Public Information Law, Access to Public Records (State Government Article of the Maryland Code, Sections 10-611 through 10-628) and the Maryland Criminal Justice Information System Law (Criminal Procedure Article 10-201-230).

III. DEFINITIONS

A. News media are defined as organizations and their accredited representatives (reporters and editors) whose purpose is to communicate news to the public through electronic media (wire services, computer networks), print media (newspapers, news magazines, newsletters, and broadcast media (radio, television).

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- B. The Park Police recognize and accord appropriate privileges to any individual employed by and presenting valid identification from any local, national, or international news organization. Freelance writers or photographers will not be accorded press privileges unless credentialed. All media inquiries shall be referred to the Public Information Officer.
- C. Records include correspondence records, reports, investigative files, photographs, computer disks and files, and drawings.

IV. AUTHORIZED SPOKESPERSONS

- A. The Park Police Division Chief is the primary spokesperson for the Division on all matters and is the only spokesperson on matters of opinion and interpretations of policy.
- B. The Public Information Officer is the primary media spokesperson responsible for sensitive matters, including confidential agency investigations and operations, personnel issues, and incidents involving race, gender, hate, and violence. The Public Information Officer or designee shall be on call at all times. He/She shall be available to respond to scenes as needed, provide responses for media inquiries, and shall assist in crisis situations within the agency.
- C. No one else is authorized to speak on behalf of the Division, except for factual information that officers may provide directly, or where they are specialists in a particular field and have been authorized to speak on a case-by-case basis by the Park Police Division Chief, or the Public Information Officer.
- D. Media matters involving multiple jurisdictions will be handled according to the current Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the appropriate jurisdiction. Media matters involving multiple jurisdictions where no Memorandum of Understanding exists will be handled by the jurisdiction with primary investigative responsibility for the matter.

V. INVESTIGATIVE INFORMATION SUBJECT TO/EXEMPT FROM RELEASE

- A. Following notification of a significant event, a park police spokesperson or designee will be available to respond to the scene or Headquarters to gather information from the officer in charge and release it as quickly as possible.
- B. Investigative or sensitive information from an internal investigation shall not be disclosed except by expressed permission of the Park Police Division Chief. Investigative information from the Investigative Operations Section shall be released only on the authority of the Park Police Division Chief. Information of this type may be released if it would not:
 - 1. Interfere with enforcement procedures;
 - 2. Deprive a person of a fair trial or impartial adjudication;
 - 3. Invade an individual's privacy;

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4. Identify a confidential source;
5. Reveal investigative techniques; or
6. Endanger the life or safety of law enforcement personnel, crime victims, witnesses, or other involved individuals.

C. Arrest Information

Requests by the media to inspect an individual's arrest record shall be denied on the grounds that it is contrary to Criminal Procedure Article 10-219, of the Maryland Code. Persons disclosing information in violation of the provisions of this article are subject to criminal prosecution. If further information is required, referral to the State's Attorney's Office shall be made. Specific information that may be released to media includes:

1. The facts and circumstances immediately surrounding an arrest or criminal investigation may be released if such disclosure would not be prejudicial to a fair trial. Such information might include the time and place of arrest, whether or not a pursuit was made or if resistance was offered, any injuries were sustained. As a result, the possession of weapons, suspect or police use of weapons, and a description of the property seized.
2. The exact offense charged and the method by which the charge was made, for example, warrant, indictment, on-view arrest by an officer, and so forth.
3. Suspect/Defendant Information
 - a. During investigation: The existence of a suspect may be acknowledged without divulging names, and then only when it will not interfere with the investigation.
 - b. After apprehension prior to being charged: A description of the suspect may be made without names or race.
 - c. After being formally charged: Defendant information may now be released: name, age, marital status, address, employment, and photo. Race and names of juveniles shall not be released.
 - d. Previous Criminal History Record Information (CHRI) (for example, previous arrests) is not to be released or confirmed by the Park Police, according to the Maryland Criminal Justice Information System (Criminal Procedure Article 10-201-230). Any person violating these provisions is guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction, is subject to a fine of not more than \$5,000 fine or imprisonment for not more than six months, or both, for each violation (Criminal Procedure Article 10-228).
 - e. Arresting Officer: The name and assignment of the arresting officer may be released.
 - f. Request for aid in locating a suspect or evidence.
 - g. Pretrial release or detention: The amount of bond, scheduled court dates, and location of detention may be released.
4. Victim's name, address, age, occupation, and injury information may be released

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when doing so would not jeopardize the victim's life or property.

- a. In cases involving jeopardy or sexual assault, names and addresses shall not be released. Only the age, sex, and geographic area of occurrence may be released.
- b. The existence, but not the contents of suicide notes may be acknowledged.

D. Information That May Not Be Released

Media requests for information denied by the Division shall be supported by a courteous and logical explanation. Justification for denial may include an explanation of privacy rights, judicial rulings, and/or the safety of the defendant, victim, or witness.

Examples of information that may not be released include:

- * Information that, if prematurely disclosed, would significantly interfere with an investigation or apprehension. Especially prohibited are premature disclosures of unchecked leads, unverified information, specific facts of an "MO," details known only to the suspect, and information that may cause a suspect to flee or avoid apprehension.
- * The identity of any deceased or seriously injured person prior to notification of next of kin. An exception is permitted when notification has been attempted but is unsuccessful within a reasonable period of time. (Eight hours may be considered reasonable).
- * The home address or telephone number of any employee of this Division unless the employee consents to its release.
- * The exact dollar value stolen from commercial institutions or private residence, which may expose them to further vulnerability.
- * Personal opinions not based on fact.

E. Information Not to Be Released to Ensure a Fair Trial

The release of information to the media is especially sensitive after an individual has been charged and prior to adjudication. For this reason, the disclosure of specific information is restricted to ensure the constitutional guarantees of a fair and impartial trial. The improper disclosure of information could form the basis for a legal defense and possible dismissal of the charges.

DO NOT RELEASE INFORMATION REGARDING

- * The prior criminal record, character, or reputation of a defendant.
- * The existence or the contents of any confession, admission, statement, or alibi given by the accused, or failure to make same.
- * The results of, or failure of, a defendant to submit to tests, such as a polygraph, and so forth.
- * The identity, testimony, credibility, or character of any witness or prospective witness.

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- * The testimony or credibility of any victim.
- * Any opinion as to the innocence or guilt of the accused or the merits of the case, such as evidence and arguments.
- * The possibility of a guilty plea, plea bargain, or other disposition, such as Stet Docket or Nolle Prosequi.
- * Transcripts, reports, or summaries of judicial proceedings from which the public and the press have been excluded by judicial proclamation.
- * A person in police custody shall not be permitted to be interviewed by the media. This restriction does not apply to persons free on bond or those incarcerated who can consent to interviews.

VI. EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. Operations Duty Officers/Supervisors shall insure that the Public Information Officer is notified for all situations/events listed in the Division Directive PG406.0 "Notifications". They shall also request notification be made for any other incident that results in a media response.
- B. Employees may answer specific questions concerning fact on any previously released incident. This includes information as to the time and location of the incident. Names and information regarding victims, witnesses, or suspects **MAY NOT** be released without approval from the Park Police Division Chief, Public Information Officer or designee.
- C. Suspects or accused persons in custody should not be deliberately posed for photographs, telecasts, or interviews.
- D. When media respond to the scene of incidents efforts should be made to assist them while not significantly interfering with police operations. In places where the press may otherwise lawfully be, no officer shall take any action to prevent or interfere with the news media. Use of police tape to cordon off a crime scene is recommended and will effectively set limits for the media.
- E. At large events, the officer-in-charge will designate a location for the media to gather until a spokesperson can provide them with information. The purpose of this gathering point is to transfer information, to maintain safety and ensure preservation of evidence. If matters of safety or evidence preservation are involved, media should be restricted to this area and an officer assigned to them until the arrival of the Public Information Officer or designee.
- F. Any contact with the media by an employee of this Division will be reported to the Public Information Officer.

VII. REQUESTS FOR WRITTEN RECORDS

- A. Media requests for police documents must be in writing and will be reviewed by the Public Information Officer pursuant to Commission Practice 5-80, Public Information

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and Records Management.

- B. Many police records are confidential under Maryland law therefore the Public Information Officer will consult with the Legal Department when confidentiality concerns exist.

VIII. DISTRIBUTION OF NEWS RELEASES

- A. The Public Relations Office will maintain a list of local, regional, national and applicable specialty media outlets. This list will include phone and fax numbers, addresses and specific contact persons.
- B. News releases will be disseminated by email, in a timely manner, to applicable media outlets as determined by the Public Information Officer.
- C. When feasible, phone contact will be made to verify receipt of news releases.

IX. COORDINATION OF PRESS CONFERENCES

- A. The Public Information Officer will be the point of contact for all inter-agency press conferences.
- B. The Public Information Officer will coordinate all Divisional press conferences.
- C. Notification of press conferences will be made via email to applicable media contacts as determined by the Public Information Officer. Phone calls will also be made to the same media contacts to encourage interest and to determine attendance.

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