

**LANCASTER POLICE DEPARTMENT
GENERAL ORDERS MANUAL**

Effective Date September 16, 2015		Amended Date		Directive 5.02.1	
Subject Public Information Officer and Release of Information					
Reference			Approved  Chief of Police		
Distribution All Personnel City Manager City Attorney		TPCA Best Practices Recognition Program Reference 5.03; 5.04		Review Date May 20, 2019	
				Pages 7	

This Operations Directive is for internal use only and does not enhance an officer's civil or criminal liability in any way. It should not be construed as a creation of a higher standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party claims. Violations of this Operations Directive, if proven, may only form the basis for a complaint by this Department, and only in a non-judicial administrative setting.

SECTION 1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to regulate the release of police department information as well as which employees may release department information to the public.

SECTION 2 POLICY

- A. It is the policy of the department that all police department information will be released in accordance with all applicable laws related to the release of information and in accordance with the provisions this policy. It is the policy of this department to make available to media representatives information pertaining to matters within the scope of the department, with the exception of instances where the law enforcement process or fair administration of justice, would be hampered by premature disclosure of information to the public.
- B. It is the policy of the department that only persons authorized by this policy may release department information to the public and/or media.

SECTION 3 PROCEDURES

- A. PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER (PIO) (TPCA 5.04)
 - 1. Whenever possible the department's Public Information Officer (PIO) shall be the sole person responsible for the release of information to the public or representatives of the media. The Public Information Officer shall have specific training as determined by the Chief of Police prior to engaging in the duties of the department's Public Information Officer. (TPCA 5.03)
 - 2. Supervisors and Division Commanders who interact with the media shall be provided appropriate training in media relations and the Public Information Act as determined by the Chief of Police.
 - 3. It shall be the responsibility of the Public Information Officer, or the highest ranking supervisor in charge at the scene of a major incident, to obtain and convey that information which can be released to media representatives present at the scene. Information on minor incidents, such as burglaries and traffic accidents, shall be released to media representatives by the supervisor in charge at the scene in the absence of a Public Information Officer.

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4. Except as otherwise stated in the provisions of this policy, employees shall not divulge information to media representatives concerning the facts of any ongoing investigation except as determined by the Chief of Police. When the release of information has been authorized, employees are encouraged to cooperate with media representatives. Employees authorized to release routine information, reports, etc., shall do so in a courteous manner, avoiding unnecessary conversation and controversy. The employee releasing the report is responsible for reviewing all of the information contained in the report to insure that the release of the information complies with the provisions of this directive. Reports should be redacted accordingly before being released.
5. The Chief of Police shall make the determination regarding all matters pertaining to the release of administrative information to media representatives, which shall include but not be limited to:
 - a. issuing policy statements to ensure prompt and responsible release of information to the public;
 - b. serving as liaison with media representatives;
 - c. ensuring that information pertaining to administrative matters is released to employees prior to public release;
 - d. information relating to department subdivisions may be released by the Division Commander, with the exception of information relating to programs or administrative changes which have not been implemented

B. ACCESS TO CRIME SCENES AND CRITICAL INCIDENTS

1. Media representatives shall not be allowed access to a crime or accident scene if, in the judgment of the officer in charge of the scene, their presence would interfere with the investigation in progress, jeopardize prosecution, or expose them to danger. When investigating incidents occurring on private property, officers shall prohibit access by media representatives if the owner or person in charge of the property specifically requests that the media not be allowed, but employees shall not solicit such a request.
2. Unauthorized persons, including media representatives, shall not be allowed access to a crime scene until the scene is released by the officer in charge.
3. The department does not permit interviews of persons in custody by media representatives without first consulting the District Attorney. Officers may not prevent brief comments by the arrestee to media representatives while in public places, i.e., at the arrest scene, in the building lobby, etc.

C. RELEASE OF INFORMATION (TPCA 5.03)

1. The following information **SHALL NOT** be released to media representatives prior to an arrest:
 - a. names and addresses of sexual assault victims;

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- b. names and addresses of juvenile victim, except in those cases where the victim is deceased, in that event, the information will not be released until the next of kin has been notified;
 - c. the identity of all deceased victims, pending notification of next of kin, once notification is made, the information shall be released by the Public Information Officer;
 - d. names and addresses of witnesses;
 - e. names and addresses of suspects who have been identified but not arrested or detained;
 - f. names and addresses of suspects who have been detained, but no charges have been filed;
 - g. identifying features of a weapon or other physical evidence;
 - h. any information that would be known only to the perpetrator;
 - i. information regarding value of items stolen;
2. The following information **MAY** be released to media representatives prior to an arrest:
- a. description of the offense, including a brief summary of events;
 - b. location and time of the offense;
 - c. injuries sustained or damages resulting from the action;
 - d. names, ages, and addresses of victims, with the exception of sexual assault and juvenile victims;
 - e. information regarding unidentified suspects, such as physical description;
 - f. age, sex, race, and city of residence of suspects who have been detained but no charges have been filed, and the fact that they are being held;
 - g. identification of a fugitive for whom a warrant has been issued;
 - h. criminal background of a fugitive when necessary to alert the public to danger;
 - i. method of complaint (officer observation, citizen complaint, warrant);
 - j. length of investigation and name of officer in charge, undercover operations may require withholding the officer's identity;
 - k. a general reenactment of the crime containing the aforementioned items of this section may be used for the purpose of the local Crime Stoppers project
3. The following information **SHALL NOT** be released to media representatives after arrest:

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- a. name of accused's employer;
 - b. names of accused juveniles;
 - c. prior criminal record of accused;
 - d. information regarding confessions or statements by the accused;
 - e. the refusal of an accused to make a statement;
 - f. the refusal of an accused to submit to tests or examinations;
 - g. results of examinations or tests taken;
 - h. description or results of laboratory examinations of physical evidence;
 - i. re-enactment of the crime;
 - j. information that the accused led investigators to the location of a weapon, contraband, or other evidence;
 - k. the fact that information used in making the arrest was obtained from an informant
4. The following information **MAY** be released to media representatives after arrest or arraignment:
- a. name, race, sex, age, address, occupation, and marital status of accused adults;
 - b. time and place of arrest;
 - c. charges filed;
 - d. information relating to the arrest, such as resistance, pursuit, possession or use of a weapon, description of contraband discovered;
 - e. identity of the agency or unit responsible for the arrest, including the name of the arresting officer, unless circumstances exist wherein the officer's safety would be jeopardized such as undercover operations;
 - f. the fact that information leading to the arrest came from a Crime Stoppers tip;
 - g. duration of the investigation;
 - h. pretrial release or detention arrangements (including amount of bond, location of detention);
 - i. scheduled dates for various stages in the judicial process;
5. Copies of police reports may be given to media representatives only in accordance with established department procedures and federal and state statutes. The employee releasing the

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report is responsible for reviewing all of the information contained in the report to insure that the release of the information complies with the provisions of this policy. Reports should be redacted accordingly before being released.

6. The Records Manager will handle open records requests. (TPCA 5.03)
7. Department photographs shall not be released to media representatives without the expressed consent of the Chief of Police. Under no circumstances shall photographs of the following be released:
 - a. crime scenes;
 - b. persons charged with a criminal offense or suspects prior to arrest (except to obtain public assistance in effecting an arrest or immediate threat to the public);
 - c. victims;
 - d. juveniles;
 - e. plainclothes officers in sensitive positions;
 - f. officers from other departments or agencies
8. Contents of criminal records shall not be divulged to any unauthorized person, within or outside the department. Employees with access to confidential information shall not release this information to anyone within the department except those for whom it was intended, unless so directed by a supervisor. Violation of the security of confidential information shall be cause for disciplinary action.
9. Photographs shall be released to media representatives of convicted sex offenders whose victims were under the age of seventeen (17).
10. Employees shall treat as confidential the following information, which shall not be released outside the department:
 - a. the identity, presence, activities, or description of undercover, plainclothes, or vice officers;
 - b. all official business of the department;
 - c. information contained in police reports or records ordinarily accessible only to employees;
 - d. allegations, gossip, hearsay and rumors originating within the department;
 - e. contents of any directive or order received, unless required by the nature of the order or directed by a supervisor
11. Employees shall not obtain, or attempt to obtain, information from department records, files, reports, or sources other than that information to which they are entitled in accordance with their

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duties and assignment. Employees shall not use information received or acquired during the course of employment for their own private purposes. Information acquired by employees, either properly or improperly, shall not be passed on to other parties, within or outside the department, except as required by law or assignment.

12. Employees are prohibited from expressing to media representatives personal opinions as follows:
 - a. conjecture regarding suspects or fugitives;
 - b. comments regarding the character or reputation of the accused;
 - c. comments regarding assumed guilt or innocence of the accused;
 - d. comments regarding the credibility of an individual's testimony in any criminal case;
 - e. comments regarding department policy, regardless of whether or not a statement has been issued by the Chief of Police
13. Employees receiving requests for public speeches, demonstrations, or exhibitions shall refer the requesting party to the Chief of Police for approval.
14. Employees shall not seek or allow personal publicity for any aspect of their employment with the department without the prior approval of the Chief of Police.
15. When a complaint is lodged against a media representative by an employee, the Chief of Police, or designee, shall investigate the complaint. The Chief of Police shall make any decision necessary concerning action to be taken against the accused media representative.

D. RELEASE OF EMPLOYEE RECORDS

1. The personnel records of department employees are not open to public inspection. The residence addresses and telephone numbers of employees shall not be released to media representatives or to the public without the expressed consent of the employee per Section 552.117(2), Texas Public Information Act. Every reasonable effort shall be made to ensure that employees receive business-related messages and when appropriate, are made available for interview or telephone contact.
2. All written request or phone calls for personnel records for current or former employees for employment purposes from another potential employer shall be referred to the Chief of Police or a Division Commander. Request from another law enforcement agency will be addressed by providing the information requested only after the law enforcement agency has provided this department with an authorization for release of information form which has been signed by the employee. Written request or phone calls for personnel records, verification of employment, dates of employment, or other information for any entity other than another law enforcement agency will be forwarded to the Human Resources Department at City Hall.

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3. Photographs of department employees shall not be released to media representatives, or displayed for public view, without the employee's written consent in accordance with Section 552.119, Texas Public Information Act.
4. The department will follow all rules and regulations of the Michael Morton and Brady Acts as required by law. All submissions required under these acts will be submitted to the Dallas County District Attorney's Office.

E. SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY

1. All members of the department shall know and comply with all aspects of this directive.
2. All Division Commanders and supervisory personnel are responsible for ensuring compliance with the provisions and intent of this directive.