

SCRANTON POLICE DEPARTMENT POLICY

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Police Media Relations

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PLEAC Standard(s):

I. PURPOSE

It is the purpose of this policy to establish guidelines for release and dissemination of public information to print and broadcast news media.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Scranton Police Department to cooperate fully and impartially with authorized news media representatives in their efforts to gather factual public information pertaining to activities of the department, as long as these activities do not unduly interfere with departmental operation, infringe upon individual rights or violate the law.

III. DEFINITIONS

Public Information – Information that may be of interest to the general public regarding policy, procedures or events involving the department or other newsworthy information that is not legally protected, does not unduly interfere with the mission of the Scranton Police Department, infringe upon the rights of a defendant or compromise the legitimate safety and privacy interests of officers, victims, witnesses or others.

News Media Representatives – Those individuals who are directly employed by agencies of the electronic or print media such as radio, television and newspapers. Freelance workers in this field are to be regarded as other members of the general public unless otherwise designated by the Chief of Police.

IV. PROCEDURES

The Chief of Police, the Captain and Detective Lieutenant, or in their absence the next highest ranking officer (Shift Commander) of each division, are the **only** members of the Scranton Police Department that are authorized to speak with the media on behalf of the Scranton Police Department. **Shift Commanders (command car)** are only authorized to release information about **recent crimes** (police blotter, etc.) that have occurred in the City. Any other requests by the news media for information on Scranton Police Department statistics (including crime, police manning and personnel), policies/procedures, rules/regulations, other police issues and/or any other official comment from the Police Department shall only come from the Chief of Police or his /her designee (Captain and/or Detective Lieutenant). Other police personnel with **prior** authorization from the Chief of Police may be permitted, on a case-by-case basis, to speak with the media.

For purposes of this policy a person will be perceived to be representing the Scranton Police Department if they are identified as a police officer or are commenting on departmental policy, procedures or events involving the department or other newsworthy information that the Scranton Police Department may be involved in.

A. Duties of Authorized Command Personnel

1. Assist news personnel in covering routine news stories and at the scenes of incidents.
2. When appropriate, assist the news media.
3. Prepare and distribute press releases.
4. Arrange for and assist at news conferences.
5. Coordinate the release of authorized information.
6. These duties cannot be delegated to another supervisor or officer without prior authorization, on a case-by-case basis, from the Chief of Police.

B. Cooperation with the Media

1. Authorized news media representatives shall have reasonable access to the commanding officer that, per policy, is authorized to speak with the media. When information must be denied to a media representative, the basis for that denial shall be courteously explained to them.
2. The Scranton Police Department recognizes identification from all local, national and international news organizations. Failure of media personnel to present authorized identification may provide grounds for restricting access to requested information or to incident scenes.
3. Public information shall be released to the media as promptly as circumstances allow, without partiality and in as objective a manner as possible.
4. Public information may be provided to media representatives by telephone if the identity of the representative is known or can be authenticated.

5. Where the authorized command personnel are unsure of the facts or the propriety of releasing information, he/she shall ascertain this information prior to providing it to the news media.
6. The Chief of Police, via chain of command, shall be informed of events (refer to Policy 07-005 Patrol Procedures) that have drawn significant news media attention.

C. Investigative Information

1. Unless the release of information may jeopardize the safety of others or hinder apprehension or is specifically prohibited by the Chief of Police or authorized designee, the following information may be released, by the authorized command personnel, in connection with an investigation:
 - a. The type or nature of an event or crime;
 - b. The location, date and time, injuries sustained, damages and a general description of how the incident occurred;
 - c. General description of property taken or weapon used, (example, sum of U.S. Currency instead of \$100.00 cash and semi-automatic handgun instead of 9mm Glock);
 - d. The identity and approximate address of a victim with the exception of sex crime victims or in other cases where reprisals or intimidation may be employed;
 - e. Requests for aid in locating evidence, a complainant or a suspect;
 - f. Number of officers or people involved in an event or investigation, and the length of the investigation; and
 - g. Name of the officer in charge of a case, his or her supervisor and division or unit assignment (exception: the name of any undercover officer will not be released).
2. Information that may **not** be released in connection with an investigation of an event or crime, unless specifically authorized by the Chief of Police, includes:
 - a. The identity of a suspect prior to arrest unless such information would aid in apprehending the suspect or serve to warn the public of potential danger;
 - b. The identity of any victim of a sex crime or any related information which, if divulged, could lead to the victim's identity;
 - c. The identity of victims or witnesses if such disclosure would prejudice an investigation to any significant degree, or it would place the victim in personal danger;
 - d. The identity of any juvenile who is a suspect or defendant in case;
 - e. The identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to notification of next of kin;
 - f. The results of any investigative procedure such as photo arrays, CVSA or polygraph tests, fingerprint comparison, ballistics tests or other investigative procedures. The fact that these tests have been

performed may, on a case-by-case basis, be revealed without further comment;

- g. Information which, if prematurely released, may interfere with the investigation or apprehension such as the nature of the leads, specifics of an “MO”, details of the crime known only to the perpetrator and the police, or information that may cause the suspect to flee or more effectively avoid apprehension;
 - h. Dollar amounts on burglaries, thefts and robberies;
 - i. Information that may be of evidentiary value in criminal proceedings;
 - j. Specific cause of death unless officially determined by the medical examiner or coroner; and
 - k. The home address or telephone number of any member of the department.
1. **Section 708 of the Right to Know Act exempts, from the categories of documents that must be made available to the public, records maintained by an agency in connection with law enforcement or other public safety activity that, if disclosed, would be reasonably likely to jeopardize or threaten public safety or preparedness or public protection activity. Pursuit, Taser, Use of Force, and other tactical policies fall into this category and need not be disclosed under the Right to Know law.**

D. Arrest Information

- 1. Following arrest, it is permissible to release
 - a. The accused’s name, age, residence, occupation and family status;
 - b. The time and place of arrest, whether pursuit or resistance was encountered, whether weapons were used, charges placed against the suspect and description of contraband seized;
 - c. The identity of the arresting officer(s) and the duration of the investigation unless the officers are engaged in undercover operations; and
 - d. The amount of bond, scheduled court dates and place of suspect’s detention;
- 2. Following arrest and formal charging of a suspect, but prior to adjudication, the following types of information shall **not** be released without express permission of the Chief of Police:
 - a. Prior criminal conviction record, character or reputation of a defendant;
 - b. Existence or contents of any confession, admission or statement of a defendant, or his or her failure or unwillingness to make a statement;
 - c. Performance or results of any tests, or a defendant’s refusal or failure to submit to tests, such as a polygraph or CVSA;
 - d. Identity, statement or expected testimony of any witness or victim;
 - e. Any opinion about the guilt or innocence of a defendant or the merits of the case; and

- f. Any opinion or knowledge of the potential for a plea bargain or other pretrial action.

E. Special Considerations – Criminal Matters

1. Department personnel shall extend every reasonable courtesy to news media representatives at crime scenes and incidents. This may include closer access of personnel and equipment than available to the general public to the degree that it does not interfere with the police mission or the movement of traffic.
2. The news media shall not be allowed access within the perimeter of the crime scene itself or other areas where there is a possibility that evidence may be damaged, altered, destroyed or otherwise prejudiced by its existence being published or portrayed.

F. Special Considerations – Noncriminal Matters

1. At the scene of significant accidents, man-made or natural catastrophes, the principles of media cooperation shall be maintained to the degree that they do not interfere with the mission of the police, fire, medical or other emergency relief workers.
2. Sensitive information relating to the internal investigation of police officers shall not be released to the media without the express permission of the Chief of Police.
3. Daily verbal reports of criminal activities will be given, upon request, to media representatives. Statistical reports of criminal activity will also, when reasonable, be made available to the media.

By Order Of:

Chief Carl R. Graziano
Superintendent of Police
Scranton Police Department