

**Oakland County Sheriff's Office**  
**GENERAL ORDERS # 1.6**



<b>SUBJECT:</b> Media Relations		<b>NUMBER:</b> 1.6
<b>EFFECTIVE DATE:</b> November 29, 2022	<b>MACP Standard Impact:</b> 1.7.1	
<b>REVIEW DATE:</b> Annually		
<b>REPLACES AND RESCINDS:</b> General Order #4 and 04-S-007	<b>DISTRIBUTION:</b> All Personnel	<b>NUMBER OF PAGES:</b> 6

This order replaces and rescinds all previously issued orders, procedures, rules and regulations, notices and/or practices in conflict with those contained within this document.

**I. PURPOSE**

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

**II. POLICY**

It is the policy of the Oakland County Sheriff's Office to cooperate fully and impartially with authorized news media representatives in their efforts to gather factual, public information pertaining to activities of the Sheriff's Office, as long as these activities do not unduly interfere with Sheriff's Office operations, infringe upon individual rights, or violate the law. Components of this order and the release of information remain at the discretion of the Sheriff.

**III. DEFINITIONS**

- A. Public Information: Information that may be of interest to the general public regarding General Orders, procedures, and events involving the Sheriff's Office or other newsworthy information that is not legally protected, does not unduly interfere with the mission of the Sheriff's Office, infringe upon the rights of a defendant, or compromise the legitimate safety and privacy interests of officers, victims, witnesses, or others.
- B. News Media Representatives: Those individuals who are directly employed by agencies of the electronic or print media such as radio, television, newspapers and internet-based media outlets. Free-lance workers in this field are to be regarded as other members of the general public unless designated by the Sheriff.
- C. Public Information Officer (PIO): The PIO shall be designated by and consult with the Sheriff. The Sheriff's Office PIO serves as a central source of information for release by the Sheriff's Office and responds to requests for information by the news media and the community as directed by the Sheriff. **(MACP Standard 1.7.1a)**

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**IV. PROCEDURES**

**A. Duties of the Public Information Officer**

1. When directed by the Sheriff or designee, the PIO will:
  - a. Assist news personnel in covering routine news stories and at the incident scene.
  - b. Assist the news media on an on-call basis.
  - c. Prepare and distribute news releases.
  - d. Arrange for and assist at news conferences.
  - e. Coordinate and authorize the release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects, ensuring accuracy and information to be released by the case Office in Charge and their respective command.
  - f. Assist in crisis situations within the Sheriff's Office and coordinate the release of authorized information concerning agency investigations and operations.

**B. Cooperation with the Media (MACP Standards 1.7.1c)**

1. Authorized news media representatives shall have reasonable access to the PIO, the Sheriff or his designee, and operations of the Sheriff's Office as governed by this order. When information must be denied to a media representative, the PIO shall explain fully and courteously the basis for the denial.
2. The Sheriff's Office recognizes authorized 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 as objectively 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. Ranking Law Enforcement Officer at crime or incident scenes may release information of a factual nature to the media as governed by this order or refer the inquiry to the PIO. Where the officer is unsure of the facts or the propriety of releasing information, he/she shall refer the inquiry to the PIO.
6. Written press statements shall be released only following approval from the Sheriff or a designee.
7. The Command Desk Sergeant shall inform the Duty Captain as soon as possible upon receipt of information about events or activities that may be of interest to the media. The Command Desk Sergeant may interact with the media on daily requests from the media on routine incidents that may be of interest to them.
8. The Duty Captain shall be responsible for ensuring that the agency's PIO and the Sheriff are informed of events that may be of interest to the media.

**C. Investigative Information**

1. Sheriff's personnel shall refer all requests on major incidents for information to the PIO or his designee beginning with the initial stage of criminal investigation and until the completion of trial or disposition without trial. Information that **may** be released in connection with the investigation of an event or crime includes:

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- 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. Type and quantity of property taken.
  - d. The victim's city of residence, with the exception of sex crime victims, juveniles, and in other cases where reprisals or intimidation may be employed.
  - e. Request for aid in locating evidence, a complainant, or suspect.
  - f. Numbers of deputies or people involved in an event or investigation, and the length of the investigation.
2. Information that may not be released in connection with an investigation or an event or crime, unless authorized by the Sheriff, Undersheriff, Major or his designee, include:
- 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 sex crime victim or any related information which, if divulged, could lead to the identity of the victim.
  - c. The identity of victims or witnesses if such disclosure would prejudice an investigation to any significant degree, or if it would place the victim in personal danger.
  - d. The identity of any juvenile who is a suspect or defendant in a case subject to the jurisdiction of the juvenile court.
  - e. The identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to notification of the next of kin.
  - f. The results of any investigative procedure such as lineups, polygraph examinations, fingerprint comparison, ballistics test, or other forensic procedures. The fact that these tests have been performed may be revealed without further comment.
  - g. Information which, if prematurely released, may interfere with the investigation or apprehension of a suspect. Such as the nature of leads, specifics of a "modus operandi" (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. Information that may be of evidentiary value in criminal proceedings.
  - i. Specific cause of death unless officially determined by the medical examiner.
  - j. The home address or telephone number of any member of the Sheriff's Office.
- D. Arrest Information
1. Following issuance of an arrest warrant, it is permissible to release:
    - a. The name of the accused, age, city of 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 officers and the duration of the investigation unless the officers are engaged in undercover operations.
    - d. The amount of bond, scheduled court dates, and location of where the suspect is being detained, unless no compromise to security.
  2. Following arrest and formal charging of a suspect, but prior to adjudication, the following types of information **should not be released** without the expressed permission of the Sheriff or his designee:

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- 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/her failure or willingness 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 examination.
- 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.
- f. Any opinion or knowledge of the potential for plea-bargain or other pretrial action.

**E. Special Considerations – Criminal Matters**

1. Departmental personnel shall extend every reasonable courtesy to news media representatives at crime scenes. This may include closer access of personnel and equipment than available to the general public. That is, only to the degree that it does not interfere with the police mission or traffic movement.
2. The news media shall not be allowed access to any area or scene of an incident or crime where there is a possibility that evidence may be damaged, altered, destroyed, or otherwise prejudiced by its existence being published or portrayed. Once evidence has been processed, removed, and secured by the Sheriff's Office, the media may be allowed to enter by permission of the Commanding Officer at the scene as follows:
  - a. On private property, photography, film, or videotape recording requires the permission of the owner or the owner's representative.
  - b. Suspects or accused persons in custody shall not be posed or arrangements made for photographs, telecasts, or interviews; nor shall Sheriff's Office personnel pose with suspects or accused persons in custody.
  - c. When an individual is charged with a criminal offense and is sought by law enforcement authorities, photographs or mug shots may be released to the media to help locate the individual. No Sheriff's Office photographs, mug shots, videotape, film or composites of subjects in custody shall be released to the media until after the issuance of warrant(s), unless authorized by the Sheriff, Undersheriff, Major or his designee.
  - d. News media shall not be permitted to photograph or televise the defendant while he/she is in police custody. This prohibition extends to where the subject is being interrogated, processed (booked) following arrest, in a "lockup" or detention facility, or where he/she may be at a hospital bedside for identification purposes. The defendant shall be escorted through public places as quietly and expeditiously as possible. The news media shall not be prevented from photographing or televising the defendant in a public place, but he/she shall not be halted or posed for their convenience.
  - e. Where the defendant is still at large and it appears that he/she is a fugitive from justice, additional information that may reasonably and directly be an aid in effecting his/her apprehension, including his/her photograph, may be released. Care should be exercised in releasing information if other jurisdictions have been asked to assist; e.g.; FBI, MSP, and/or local authorities to prevent premature disclosure or apprehension efforts.
3. At the scene of major crimes, such as hostage and barricade situations, the Officer in Charge shall designate a preliminary press area as early as possible and as close to the scene as safety and operations requirements allow.

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4. The fact that a suicide or suspected suicide has occurred **may** be reported to the media, along with factual information describing how it happened. The name, age, address, sex, and occupation of the victim may also be released following notification of the next of kin. The fact that a suicide note exists may also be acknowledged without further comment. The contents of such notes are personal and confidential and shall not be released except as provided by law.

**F. Special Considerations – Non-Criminal 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 Law Enforcement, fire, medical, or other emergency relief workers.
2. Media access to and movement within fire lines shall be controlled by the Fire Officer in charge. In consultation with the Fire Officer in charge, the ranking Law Enforcement Officer at the scene shall establish an observation point from which the media may observe and photograph the incident. At the discretion of the Office in Charge, an inner perimeter may be established for the media from which to record the event.
3. News media representatives should not be prevented from access to any area solely because of the possibility that they may be injured or killed. If this is the only consideration, the media representative should be advised of the danger and allowed to make the decision to enter on his/her own volition.
4. Sensitive information relating to internal investigation of Law Enforcement Officers shall not be released without the expressed permission of the Sheriff, Undersheriff, or Major.
5. Daily reports of criminal activity will be made available to media representatives on a routine basis. Statistical reports of criminal activity will also be made available to the media.
6. Media representatives shall be denied access to the contents of investigative or incident reports and records where the release of the information would:
  - a. Interfere with law enforcement proceedings, including pending investigations.
  - b. Deprive a person of the right to a fair trial or an impartial adjudication or give one party an undue advantage by exclusive access to such information.
  - c. Constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy rights of another person.
  - d. Reveal the identity of an individual who has furnished information to the Sheriff's Office under confidential circumstances.
  - e. Disclose investigative techniques and procedures, thereby impairing future effectiveness of the Sheriff's Office.
  - f. Endanger the life or physical safety of any person.

**G. Media Access to Scenes (MACP Standard 1.7.1b)**

1. Media representatives will be afforded access to scenes and provided all appropriate information possible with consideration of Sheriff's Office operations, individual rights and violations of law adhered to. It is important to note that media representatives will be denied access to information, scenes, or conferences should any of the following occur:
  - a. Failure to have appropriate identification.
  - b. Failure to abide by requests to not enter restricted areas.

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- c. Interfere with law enforcement proceedings, including pending investigations.
- d. Deprive a person of the right to a fair trial or an impartial adjudication or give one party an undue advantage by exclusive access to such information.
- e. Constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy rights of another person.
- f. Reveal the identity of an individual who has furnished information to the Department under confidential circumstances.
- g. Disclose investigative techniques and procedures, thereby impairing future effectiveness of the Sheriff's Office.
- h. Endanger the life or physical safety of any person.



**ISSUED BY:** Sheriff Michael J. Bouchard