



GENERAL ORDER		DATE 10/16/2007	GO-29-2007
 <p>DOUGLAS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE OMAHA * NEBRASKA TIMOTHY DUNNING SHERIFF</p>	CALEA STANDARD: 54.1		RE-EVALUATE : AS NEEDED
	APPROVED: 		
CHAPTER TITLE:			
SUBJECT: MEDIA RELATIONS 2007			AUTHOR CM

THIS GO SUPERSEDES GO-17-2005.

I. PURPOSE

This Directive provides guidelines as to types of information that may be released to media representatives, to specify some types of information that may not be released, to identify who may release information, and to establish procedures for media representative relationships with the Douglas County Sheriff's Office (DCSO).

II. POLICY

The DCSO will inform the public and the news media of events that involve the DCSO and its members. Information of public interest will be made available in a timely manner except in those instances where withholding information is necessary to protect the constitutional rights of the accused, to protect the integrity of an investigation, to ensure officer safety, or because it is legally privileged.

III. PROCEDURE

A. Public Information Function - The DCSO is committed to a cooperative public information relationship with the media that includes:

1. Assisting news personnel in covering news stories at the scenes of incidents.
2. Being available for on-call responses to the news media;
3. Preparing and distributing agency news releases.
4. Arranging for, and assisting at news conferences.

5. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects.
6. Assisting in crisis situations within the agency.
7. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential agency investigations and operations.
8. Developing procedures for releasing information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort.

B. General Release of Information

1. Only the Sheriff or Chief Deputy will release information regarding Departmental policy, procedure, rules, regulations, internal investigations and crime/clearance rates.
2. The USB Captain may release information contained in original reports, accident investigations or Patrol Division activities.
3. The ASB Captain may release information regarding activities of the ASB or the Community Services Division.
4. The CIB Captain may release information pertaining to any and all crimes, both ongoing and resolved, as well as, any and all narcotics investigations, both ongoing and resolved.
5. The CSB Captain may release information regarding any incidents at the Hall of Justice, prisoner transportation and courtroom security. In addition, s/he may release routine information contained in original reports, criminal histories, warrants, tax foreclosures and any information relating to writs received from the courts.

6. Any member of the DCSO may have occasion to deal with members of the news media.

- a) Unless specifically instructed otherwise, an employee directly involved in a case or incident, which becomes a matter of public interest may provide information to the news media regarding that case or incident.
- b) Each Deputy is held responsible for the information s/he gives and will not prejudice any case by the information provided.

C. Media Liaison -In a continued effort to foster and facilitate effective working relationships with the media, the DCSO will seek opportunities to involve members of Omaha area television, radio, and print media in the development of/changes in DCSO policy related to the public information function.

D. Release of information - Information that may be released pertaining to victims, witnesses and suspects prior to any arrests is limited to:

1. A description of the offense, including a brief summary of events.
2. Location, date and time of offense.
3. Property loss (not to include a dollar amount), injuries sustained or damage resulting from the action.
4. Identity of the victim, except for a victim of a sexual offense, a death, a situation where the next of kin have not been notified, or when the victim is a juvenile.
5. Information regarding unidentified suspects, such as physical description or vehicle description, when release will not hinder or jeopardize the investigation.
6. Identification of fugitive suspect(s) for who arrest warrants have been issued.
7. Criminal background of a fugitive when the public should be alerted to any danger.

E. Prohibited Release of Information Prior to Arrest - The following information *will not be released* prior to any arrests:

1. The identity of any suspect who is interviewed, but not charged.
2. The identity of witnesses or victims, where such information could subject them to danger or extreme embarrassment.
3. The identity of the victim of any sexual offense.

4. The exact location of a sex offense, where such information could lead to identification of the victim.

5. The identity of any juvenile.

6. Exact information about a weapon or other physical evidence.

7. Conjecture about suspects or fugitives.

8. Any misleading or false information

F. Release of Information Subsequent to Arrest -

The following information may be released subsequent to the arrest of a suspect:

1. Time, date and location of arrest.
2. Defendant's name, age, residence, usual occupation and marital status.
3. Criminal charge(s)
4. Facts and circumstances relating to the arrest, such as resistance, pursuit or possession or use of a weapon.
5. Mug Shot photo, if available. The Crime Scene Investigation Division and the Records Division may release/sell mug shot photos.
6. Record of Arrest (Booking Sheet) with Social Security #, any medical condition, illness, or injury, and medications redacted. The Records Division and the LEC Front Desk Division may release/sell the copy of the Record of Arrest.
7. Criminal Citations. The Records Division and the LEC Front Desk Division may release/sell copies of criminal citations.
8. Traffic Citations. Copies of traffic citations are not available for release/sale by the DCSO as DotComm enters them into the county mainframe computer. Persons requesting copies of traffic citations should be directed to the County Court criminal/traffic court window at the Hall of Justice.

G. Release of Reports

1. The Records Division (CSB) and the Front Desk Division (ASB) may, with the exclusions listed below, release (sell) copies of offense reports, accident reports, and continuations to those reports, to the media.
 - a) Information on Crimes Against Person reports regarding the 'extent of injury' and "condition of the victim" will not be redacted from the report.

- b) Reports of suicides or attempted suicides (Crime Against Person/Casualty reports) will not be released.
- c) Reports of sexual assaults will not be released
- d) Reports of any offense in which the victim is a juvenile will not be released.

H. Prohibited Release of Information - The following information will not be released:

- 1. Comments about the suspect's character or reputation, or opinions regarding his guilt or innocence.
- 2. Information about the existence or content of confession, admission or statement made by the suspect.
- 3. The suspect's refusal to make a statement, or to submit to tests or examinations.
- 4. Results of any tests or examinations, to include B.A.C. results in DUI offenses.
- 5. The identity, testimony or credibility of any witness.
- 6. Information that the suspect directed investigators to the location of any evidence.
- 7. Information that could compromise officer safety.
- 8. The DCSO will not release any information, to include reports or mug shot photos, related to offenses being investigated by other Douglas County law enforcement agencies (Omaha Police Department, Nebraska State Patrol, Games and Parks, Boystown Police Department, Valley Police Department, etc.) unless that agency specifically authorizes the release of that information by the DCSO.

I. Media Access - The DCSO will facilitate the media's access to information, ensuring that the release of information conforms to applicable law and policy, that personnel and the public are not endangered and that the integrity of any investigation is preserved.

- 1. The DCSO does not issue press credentials, however, it will deny access to the scene of any crime or to DCSO records to any media representative who interferes in an investigation while at the scene of an incident, or who obtains and publishes information restricted by law.

- 2. Media representatives will not be allowed access to any area or scene where such access would obviously disrupt DCSO operations or deployment, nor will the media be allowed access to an area where their presence would jeopardize the life of, or present substantial risk of injury to any citizen or DCSO employee.

J. Fire, Natural Disaster, Catastrophic Events Access

- 1. Although the scene of a fire, natural disaster or other catastrophic event may be closed to the general public, authorized media representatives are exempt from restriction, and will not be denied access solely because of the danger.
- 2. When danger is the only consideration, media personnel will be advised of the dangerous conditions and will be responsible for their own decisions to enter upon the scene.

K. Crime/Incident Scene Protection

- 1. The news media will 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.
- 2. Once evidence has been processed, removed or secured by DCSO personnel, the media may be allowed to enter by the ranking member on the scene.
- 3. Once the integrity of a crime scene is ensured, media mobility will not be restricted, except that permission must be obtained from owners or their representatives when photographs, films or videotapes are to be taken on private property.
- 4. Media representatives will not be allowed to interfere with the activities or general traffic flow at the scene of any incident or crime.

L. Fire Scene

- 1. The fire official in charge will control media access to and movement within fire lanes at commercial and residential fire scenes.
- 2. When news media arrive at a fire scene, the ranking Deputy on scene will confer with the fire official in charge and assist in establishing an observation point from which media may observe and photograph.

M. Perimeter Establishment

1. The ranking Deputy at a scene is responsible for determining and establishing a perimeter.
2. In the event the Sheriff's Office Emergency Services Unit (ESU) is called to a scene, the ESU command will establish the necessary perimeter(s).
3. The line over which the media may not cross will be a reasonable distance away from the scene in order to ensure its protection, yet provide the media an opportunity to adequately report and photograph the incident.
4. At the discretion of the ranking Deputy, a perimeter, closer to the scene than the perimeter for the general public, may be established for the media. Security of the scene and preservation of evidence will be the determining factors.