

# FREDERICK POLICE DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDER

**Section 15:** Information and Records  
**Topic:** **COMMUNITY NOTIFICATIONS AND  
MEDIA RELATIONS**

**Order Number:** 1550  
**Issued by:** Chief of Police

**Approved:** 10/19/15  
**Review:** Annually in April by the Deputy Chief of Police  
**Supersedes:** G.O. 1550 dated 03/01/13

## **.01 PURPOSE:**

To establish guidelines for employee and news media relationships.

## **.02 CROSS-REF:**

All General Orders in Section 15, "Information and Records"  
G.O. [110](#), "Emergency Notification"  
G.O. [460](#), "Critical Incidents"  
All General Orders in Section 4, "Tactical Operations"  
CALEA STANDARDS 54.1.3  
[OSB-022 Press Release](#)

## **.03 DISCUSSION:**

Personnel of the Department are frequently asked to provide information to media representatives. Employees should answer such questions appropriately or refer the person to the proper individual or agency. When a request concerns police matters, members should decide if they are qualified to respond and if the person making the request is a proper person to receive the information. Generally, employees should be open in their dealings with the media and supply requested information when they are legally able to do so; however, employees should be careful to avoid representing their opinions as fact.

## **.04 POLICY:**

It is the policy of the Frederick Police Department to cooperate with the news media in fulfilling its responsibility of informing the public of events within the public domain that are handled by or involve the Department to the extent permitted by law and operational ability. On-duty supervisory or command personnel are designated as the primary source for news media to contact when seeking information concerning operational activities of the Department. The Public Information Officer (PIO) is the source of information concerning routine activities of the department (i.e., crime statistics, police/citizen partnerships, etc.) The PIO will also support supervisory and command personnel as requested concerning operational activities.

## **.05 DEFINITIONS:**

**MAJOR INCIDENT** - Situations involving homicides; officer-involved shootings; natural disasters; major fire or aircraft incidents; hostage situations, etc., which require police response.

**NEWS MEDIA** - Legitimate news gathering and disseminating agencies with recognized credentials to include press, radio, television, magazine, wire services, and photographers/cameramen.

**PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER** A police department employee specifically designated as the Public Information Officer (PIO) by Chief of Police or his designee.

**PUBLIC PRESENTATION** - a speech, demonstration, or formal address given to a group of individuals by a member of the agency on a specific topic.

**.10 AUTHORITY:**

1. The Chief of Police is the principal spokesperson for the Frederick Police Department on policy issues and any other concerns he chooses to address. Media inquiries pertaining to Departmental policies and procedures shall be referred to the Office of the Chief of Police for his response or that of his designee.
2. After normal business hours, supervisors and commanders shall be the primary sources of information for the Department and shall release appropriate information concerning operational activities.

**.20 DUTIES OF THE PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER:**

1. The PIO coordinates the flow of routine information to the media. The PIO is the official spokesperson for the Department. The PIO may, upon request:
  - A. Prepare and distribute news releases concerning departmental activities, events, or other public interest stories;
  - B. Assist the news media on follow-up calls to clarify issues or to give new information;
  - C. Assist at news conferences;
  - D. Assist at incidents with media inquiries in consultation with supervisory or command personnel;
  - E. Develop procedures for releasing information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort;
  - F. At the direction of the Chief, invite the management of all local media outlets to attend meetings as needed to discuss issues concerning the development and administration of police policies affecting the news media and to critique police/media relations;
  - G. Provide copies of this directive to the news media who have a news coverage interest in the City of Frederick and encourage them to make comments/recommendations to maintain a good working relationship; and
  - H. Receive and coordinate public presentations by members of the Department when appropriate.
2. The PIO shall not release any information about confidential agency investigations or internal matters within the Department. The Chief of Police or his designee shall be the only persons allowed to release such confidential information.

**.30 ON-SCENE ACTIVITIES:**

The on-scene supervisor or command member in charge of an incident will designate personnel (police operations permitting) to assist the media as necessary and appropriate. All release of information must be coordinated with the on-scene supervisor/commander prior to the release of the information. Information will be released as soon as possible.

**.35 ON-SCENE MEDIA ACCESS:**

1. Generally, all news releases will be made at Headquarters. In the event of major events such as disasters, major crime scenes, etc., the Department will attempt to allow media access for photos and television within the limitations of public safety, civil rights restrictions, and crime scene integrity.

2. In the case of announced major events such as demonstrations or large-scale catastrophes, the Department will attempt to designate a specific on-scene area for the media with Departmental personnel to assist.
3. At crime and accident scenes, media will not be permitted access beyond the non-public access perimeter established by the Department; however a press staging area may be established. Access will not be permitted by the incident commander until emergency and investigative actions have been completed.
4. The supervisor **WILL NOT ALLOW** media access to private property. The media is responsible for obtaining any permission necessary for access to a scene where private property is concerned. If allowed, entry will be made by media *only* after police have relinquished the scene.

**.40 AFTER-HOURS ACTIVITIES:**

1. Supervisors will be the primary source of information for the Department and will release appropriate information concerning operational occurrences. Both during and after normal business hours, Patrol Division Supervisors will notify their commander upon the occurrence of any major incident, such as:
  - A. Any situation involving the death of a person by other than natural causes. Notification shall be immediate in the event of a homicide or suspected homicide. It may be by report in the event of a suicide or accident (Note - Suicides will generally not be released to the media unless they occur in a public location);
  - B. All officer-involved shootings;
  - C. Any natural disaster involving police response;
  - D. Any major fire or aircraft incident involving police response; and
  - E. Barricaded gunman/hostage situations.
2. If any unusual situation occurs which is outside the parameters of normal police activities not listed above, the supervisor will notify his commander for further instructions prior to releasing the information.

**.50 MULTIPLE AGENCY INCIDENTS:**

Information involving the Department may be released according to guidelines set forth in this order unless such release would affect other agencies in the performance of their duties. Information requests that affect other agencies or departments will be referred directly to that agency or department. When the City of Frederick Emergency Operations Plan is activated, media guidelines contained therein will be followed.

**.55 PRESS RELEASES:**

1. Supervisors, Commanders or the PIO, are authorized to make press releases per this directive.
2. Arrests or incidents will be released CivicPlus ([www.cityoffrederick.com/admin](http://www.cityoffrederick.com/admin)).
3. Department activities such as promotions, crime prevention programs, project reports, etc., may be released in narrative form.
4. All press releases will be disseminated simultaneously to those organizations or individuals who have specifically requested to receive press releases, utilizing the best means available.

5. Press releases shall be disseminated as soon as possible after the event, within the constraints of official police duties, and definitely prior to the conclusion of the supervisor's tour of duty.
6. Press releases will be automatically archived on the Departmental website.
7. Individuals or organizations interested in receiving press releases from the department will be directed to the department's website ([www.cityoffrederick.com/police](http://www.cityoffrederick.com/police)) to sign up to receive press releases.

**.60 COMMUNITY CRIME NOTIFICATIONS:**

1. Supervisors, Commanders or the PIO, are authorized to approve Community Crime Notifications per this directive.
2. Incidents or situations where the notification to the public would benefit the public or the department in areas of safety or in the interest of information sharing may be disseminated to the media on Form CID-035 Entitled, "Community Crime Notification."
3. All Crime Notifications will be disseminated simultaneously to those organizations or individuals who have specifically requested to receive them, utilizing the best means available.
5. Community Crime Notifications shall be disseminated as soon as possible after the event, within the constraints of official police duties.
6. Community Crime Notifications will be archived on the R-drive in the folder titled, [R:\Common\Community Crime Notification](#)
7. Individuals or organizations interested in receiving Community Crime Notifications from the Department will be directed to the Department's Community Outreach Specialist to be added to the distribution list for dissemination.

**.63 COMMUNITY NOTIFICATIONS INVOLVING ACTIVE THREATS:**

1. Supervisors, Commanders or the PIO, are authorized to approve community notifications involving active threats per this directive.
2. Incidents or situations where the notification to the public would benefit the public or the department in areas of safety or may be disseminated via Civic Plus in either a press release or through the Communications Section via Everbridge in the form of a reverse 911.
3. Community Notifications Involving Active Threat Situations shall be disseminated as soon as possible during or after the event, within the constraints of official police duties.

**.65 RELEASE OF PHOTOGRAPHS/VIDEO:**

1. When issuing a press release, it may be appropriate to attach a photograph or video. The release of photographs or videos will be restricted to the following instances:
  - A. When requesting information from the community regarding the identity of an individual(s) pictured in a surveillance photograph;
  - B. When requesting assistance from the community in apprehending a missing person or a fugitive;
  - C. When a media representative requests a booking photograph of the

defendant(s), and the release of the booking photograph(s) is contemporaneous with the press release documenting the incident being disseminated to the media;

- D. When releasing information relative to Department events, promotions, etc.; or
  - E. As approved by the Office of the Chief.
2. In cases of arrestees, the officer issuing the press release will arrange to obtain the booking photograph from Central Booking. Each booking photograph will be scanned utilizing the jpeg format, identifying each image with the Defendant's surname. Each image will then be attached to the message accompanying the press release.
  3. Requests for booking photographs not contemporaneous as stated herein will be considered Criminal History Record Information and will be subject to the provisions of G.O. 1501.
  4. Release and use of photographs, images and/or videos obtained while on-duty is strictly prohibited unless approved by the Chief of Police or his designee and is included in paragraph .61.1 A thru E. of this order.

**.70 INFORMATION RELEASE GUIDELINES:**

1. All information released through media interviews or press releases will be made in accordance with this order and applicable state and federal statutes pertaining to the Freedom of Information Act.
2. The following information **WILL** be made public and included in the press release:
  - A. The investigations of crime(s) committed against a person(s) or property where the suspect is not known or apprehended, and the release of information will aid in the identification of a suspect or prevent additional victims of similar instances. (except when the release of this information could impede the investigative process.) The purpose for disseminating this information should be considered a crime prevention effort.
    - **NOTE: The Title of the press release will be related to the type of event followed by the case number i.e..."Traffic Arrest (12-12345)**
  - B. An arrestee's name, age, sex, general address such as Frederick, MD, date, time and place of arrest (EXCEPTION - name and address of juvenile, unless the juvenile is charged as an adult);
  - C. The charges on which the arrestee is being held;
  - D. The identity of the investigator and/or arresting officers;
  - E. Physical evidence seized, if disclosure will not harm the investigation; and
  - F. Physical descriptions **(including race) of unknown suspects.**
3. The following information **MAY** be released unless otherwise restricted herein:
  - A. The type or nature of an event or crime such as accident, fire, homicide, rape, etc.;
  - B. The approximate location (hundred block, apartment complex, etc.), date and time, injuries sustained, damages and a general description of how the incident

occurred;

- C. Type and quantity of property taken except as prohibited herein;
- D. The identity and approximate address of a victim, with the EXCEPTION of a sex crime or child abuse victim, and in other cases where reprisals or intimidation may be employed;
- E. Casualty figures, to include known dead or injured;
- F. To make an announcement, at the time of seizure, of any physical evidence other than a confession, admission, or statement, which is limited to a general description of the evidence seized;
- G. Numbers of officers, or persons, involved in an event or investigation and the length of the investigation;
- H. Facts that would indicate why the event occurred, such as domestic related or drug related, etc.

**.75 RESTRICTED INFORMATION:**

- 1. The following types of information will **NOT** be released without the express permission of the Chief of Police or his designee:
  - A. Information concerning litigation, complaints, charges or other action pending against any employee or person attached to the Department;
  - B. The prior criminal record or statements as to the character and reputation of a defendant;
  - C. The existence or contents of any purported confession, admission or statements given by a defendant or the defendant's refusal or failure to make such a statement;
  - D. The performance or results of any test, or examination, or refusal or failure to take such a test or examination, particularly as related to a polygraph;
  - E. The name, address, identity, testimony or credibility of any prospective witness to the crime;
  - F. Any opinion of the defendant's guilt or innocence in any matters relating to the merits of a case;
  - G. Any information surrounding any juvenile investigation, incident, or arrest other than specified in this order under "Information Release Guidelines;"
  - H. The identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to the notification of next of kin (except when notification has been attempted but is not possible within a reasonable time as determined by a commander);
  - I. Investigative information and information of an evidentiary nature;
  - J. The specific cause of death until determined by the medical examiner;
  - K. Information concerning the amount of cash loss in a robbery or burglary, specific

description of valuables other than in general categories, or any other information when it will most probably lead to a recurrence of a crime (EXCEPTION - when it may be beneficial to release such information as the number and descriptions of credit cards, money orders, checks, etc.);

- L. Contents of suicide notes;
  - M. Speed of vehicles involved in police chases;
  - N. Personal opinion not founded on fact.
  - O. The race or ethnicity of any victim or witness, unless the information is used as a tool in the investigation.
2. News media interviews of subjects while in Department custody will not be granted, nor will the news media be allowed to photograph arrestees, witnesses, or victims within any Department buildings. Defendants will not be taken outside of any Department buildings for the purpose of photographing, taping, or viewing by the news media.
  3. Anytime a representative of the news media is denied access to certain information, as outlined above, they will be given a courteous explanation of the reasons for denial.

**.80 CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION:**

No Departmental employee will disclose to any person who does not have an official "need to know" any confidential information whatsoever concerning:

1. The activities, administration, or operations of the Department;
2. Criminal History Record Information;
3. Identities of officers in covert positions and informants;
4. Investigations of every variety;
5. All personnel matters;
6. Any other information a reasonable and prudent person would consider "confidential."

**.85 NEWS MEDIA RESPONSIBILITIES:**

1. Official press passes, issued by the media source, must be prominently displayed to admit a member of the news media to any portion of police buildings not open to the general public, to any press conference, to any media staging area, or into any media scene perimeter set by the incident commanding officer. Entry into a non-public area of any police building will be by invitation only.
2. Members of the Department shall not interfere with the lawful activities of the news media at the scene of a crime or other event, except where certain activities are excluded in this order. Members of the media will **not be allowed access** to any area in which it is possible that:
  - A. Evidence may be damaged, destroyed, altered or compromised until the evidence has been photographed, processed, removed, and secured by Departmental personnel and then only by permission of the incident commanding officer;
  - B. Tactical plans/operations would (or could) be disrupted; or

- C. It would endanger the life of or present a substantial possibility of injury to any person.
- 3. The Department expects the cooperation of the news media in protecting the identity of undercover officers and those officers involved in special investigations. Department employees shall take care to safeguard the identities of these investigators.

**.90 PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS:**

- 1. Supervisors will assign appropriate personnel to handle public presentations upon request. Any topic that the supervisor considers controversial will be brought to the attention of the Chief of Police through the chain of command prior to assignment.
- 2. Any request for a public presentation ("talk") will be documented on an incident report stating date, time, location, topic, group to be addressed, and personnel assigned. After completing the presentation, the person assigned will complete the narrative of the incident report noting any information (positive or negative) that the chain of command needs to be aware of as well as the approximate number of people in attendance. Copies will be forwarded to the chain of command and to the PIO for his file. If information comes to light, which requires appropriate police action, the member will initiate paperwork (i.e., zone checks, notation in Daily Bulletin, etc.) to address the specific problem.
- 3. A record of the number and type of presentations given to the public will be produced and included in the department's annual report as directed by the Chief of Police.

**.95 COMMUNITY MEETINGS:**

Depending upon assignment, personnel may be required to attend meetings with public groups on a regular schedule to discuss neighborhood issues (i.e., Neighborhood Advisory Committees, coalition meetings, Housing Authority meetings, Human Relations Commission, etc.). Personnel attending community meetings will follow the same reporting procedures as a public presentation.

**.97 ROUTINE BUSINESS MEETINGS:**

Routine business meetings will not require documentation unless there is a need for further police response or information that needs to go through the chain of command.