

News Media Relations

340.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidelines for media releases and media access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies, and other law enforcement activities.

340.2 RESPONSIBILITIES

The ultimate authority and responsibility for the release of information to the media shall remain with the Sheriff, however, in situations not warranting immediate notice to the Sheriff and in situations where the Sheriff has given prior approval, Commanders, Department Commanders, and designated Public Information Officer(s) may prepare and release information to the media in accordance with this policy and the applicable law.

340.2.1 MEDIA REQUEST

Any media request for information or access to a law enforcement situation shall be referred to the designated Department media representative, or if unavailable, to the first available supervisor. Prior to releasing any information to the media, Members shall consider the following:

1. At no time shall any Member of this Department make any comment or release any official information to the media without prior approval from a supervisor or the designated Department media representative;
2. In situations involving multiple law enforcement agencies, every reasonable effort should be made to coordinate media releases with the authorized representative of each involved agency prior to the release of any information by this Department;
3. Under no circumstance should any Member of this Department make any comment(s) to the media regarding any law enforcement incident not involving this Department without prior approval of the Sheriff.

340.3 MEDIA ACCESS

Authorized and bona fide Members of the media shall be provided access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies, and other law enforcement activities subject to the following conditions (Penal Code § 409.5(d)):

1. The media representative shall produce valid press credentials that shall be prominently displayed at all times while in areas otherwise closed to the public.
2. Media representatives may be prevented from interfering with emergency operations and criminal investigations
 - (a) In situations where media access would reasonably appear to interfere with emergency operations and/or a criminal investigation, every reasonable effort should be made to provide media representatives with access to a command post at the nearest location that will not interfere with such activities.
 - (b) Whenever the presence of media or other aircraft pose a threat to public or officer safety or significantly hampers incident operations, the field supervisor should

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consider requesting a Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR). All requests for TFR should be routed through the Department Commander. A TFR, either for a pre-planned operation or an unplanned incident, should include specific information regarding the perimeter and altitude necessary for the incident and should be requested through the appropriate controlling tower. If the controlling tower is not known, the Federal Aviation Administration should be contacted (Federal Aviation Regulations § 91.137).

3. No Member of this Department shall be subjected to media visits or interviews without the consent of the involved Member (Government Code § 3303(e)).
4. Media interviews with individuals who are in custody shall not be permitted without the approval of the Sheriff and the expressed consent of the person in custody.

340.3.1 PROVIDING ADVANCE INFORMATION

To protect the safety and rights of deputies and other persons, advance information about planned actions by law enforcement personnel, such as movement of persons in custody or the execution of an arrest or search warrant, should not be disclosed to the news media, nor should media representatives be invited to be present at such actions except with the prior approval of the Sheriff.

Any exceptions to the above should only be considered for the furtherance of legitimate law enforcement purposes. Prior to approving any exception, the Sheriff shall consider, at minimum, whether the release of information or presence of the media would unreasonably endanger any individual, prejudice the rights of any person, or is otherwise prohibited by law.

340.4 SCOPE OF INFORMATION SUBJECT TO RELEASE

The Department shall maintain a daily information log of significant law enforcement activities that shall be made available, upon request, to media representatives through the Department Commander. This log shall generally contain the following information:

1. The date, time, location, case number, type of crime, extent of injury or loss, and names of individuals (except confidential informants) involved in crimes occurring within this jurisdiction unless the release of such information would endanger the safety of any individual or jeopardize the successful completion of any ongoing investigation
2. The date, time, location, case number, name, birth date, and charges for each person arrested by this Department unless the release of such information would endanger the safety of any individual or jeopardize the successful completion of any ongoing investigation
3. The time and location of other significant law enforcement activities or requests for service with a brief summary of the incident subject to the restrictions of this policy and applicable law

At no time shall identifying information pertaining to a juvenile arrestee, victim, or witness be publicly released without prior approval of a competent court.

Information concerning incidents involving certain sex crimes and other offenses set forth in Government Code § 6254(f) shall be restricted in accordance with applicable statutory provisions.

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Identifying information concerning deceased individuals shall not be released to the media until notification of next of kin or otherwise cleared through the Coroner's Office.

Any requests for copies of related reports or additional information not contained in this log shall be referred to the designated Department media representative, the custodian of records, or if unavailable, to the Department Commander. Such requests shall generally be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Public Records Act (Government Code § 6250, et seq.).

340.4.1 RESTRICTED INFORMATION

It shall be the responsibility of the authorized Member dealing with media requests to ensure that restricted information is not inappropriately released to the media by this Department. When in doubt, authorized and available legal counsel should be obtained. Examples of such restricted information include, but are not limited to:

1. Confidential peace officer personnel information (See Policy Manual § 1026)
 - (a) The identities of deputies involved in shootings or other major incidents may only be released to the media pursuant to consent of the involved deputy or upon a formal request filed and processed in accordance with the Public Records Act
2. Copies of traffic collision reports (except to the involved parties and their authorized representatives) (Vehicle Code § 20012)
3. Criminal history information
4. Information that would tend to endanger the safety of any individual or jeopardize the successful completion of any ongoing investigation
5. Information pertaining to pending litigation involving this Department
6. Information obtained in confidence
7. Any information that is otherwise privileged or restricted under state or federal law. (Government Code § 6254(k))