



Wichita Police Department Policy Manual

Approved by:

Policy 706-News Media Relations

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Maintained by:
Chief of Police

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PHILOSOPHY:

706.01 It is the policy of this Department to communicate impartially with members of the news media. Within the guidelines set forth in this policy, members of the Wichita Police Department will assist the media with information, as long as the information does not:

- A. Compromise the investigation of a police incident; or
- B. Detract from the ability to successfully prosecute a case in court; or
- C. Violate an individual's legal right to privacy; or
- D. Jeopardize the safety of any officer or citizen; or
- E. Interfere with Departmental operations.

NEWS MEDIA REQUIREMENTS AND PRIVILEGES:

- 706.02
- A. Reasonable efforts shall be made to release information equally, without partiality for any media segment [i.e., print, radio, TV, etc.]
 - B. Daily press reports will be made available to the media Monday through Friday at 10 a.m. Weekend Interwatch briefings will take place in the squad room at Patrol West at 12:00 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. Second Watch field supervisors from each of the Patrol Bureaus will conduct the briefings on a rotating basis. In preparation for the weekend Interwatch briefings, material of a sensitive nature in the squad room will be covered prior to the arrival of the media. There will be no Interwatch briefings on official City of Wichita holidays.
 - C. The Assistant to the Chief, or designee, is responsible to provide daily "Interwatch" briefings to the media. The Assistant to the Chief will respond to initial inquiries by the media, but may refer inquiries to the respective Division Deputy Chiefs or Bureau Captains.
 - D. Department members must maintain a neutral image. Therefore, the City and the Department prohibits members of the Department from issuing statements regarding political issues, items of consideration before the City Council, or policy decisions. All requests for information involving policy matters, or matters proposed before the City Council, shall be approved by the Chief of Police.
 - E. Any Department member who grants a media interview about subjects, incidents or issues of a controversial, critical or sensitive nature that draws or has the potential to draw significant media attention to the Department will notify their respective Watch Commander or Bureau Commander in advance who then will notify the Assistant to the Chief.
 - F. Media Advisories are released by the Office of the Chief of Police. Media advisories describe routine happenings or information detailing the who, what, when, or where of an event or incident.
 - G. Members of the media will not be allowed to accompany and/or ride along with police personnel unless approved by the Chief of Police or Duty Chief.
 - H. Members of the media may not resist, obstruct or oppose an officer in the lawful execution of his/her duty. However, the mere presence of a member of the media, the taking of pictures, or the asking of questions does not constitute unlawful interference.
 - I. Members of the media will be allowed to conduct interviews with Department members in the following locations: the squad room in each patrol bureau, and at City Hall in the fifth floor Briefing Room, the Field Services conference room or the Chief's conference room. Members of the media will not be allowed access to working areas in City Hall without permission of the Deputy Chief or Acting Deputy Chief in charge of each division. If granted access to any working area or squad room for purposes of an interview, members of the media will be escorted to and from the location where the interview is to be conducted.

MAJOR INCIDENTS:

- 706.03
- A. The ranking officer at the scene of a police incident shall provide timely briefings to members of the media. This responsibility may be delegated to a knowledgeable member of the ranking officer's staff.
 - B. In the case of a major incident, media representatives will be allowed access to an area near the Departmental Command Post. The Commanding Officer will be aware of photographers' needs in regards to proximity to the incident.

- C. Updated information shall be released periodically on major incidents to members of the media, until police presence is no longer required at the scene. After the initial scene investigation is completed, the Bureau Commander, or designee, who is responsible for any follow-up action will issue subsequent media releases, as needed.
- D. When an operation involves multiple agencies the agency with primary jurisdiction will make determinations regarding appropriate media releases.

RELEASE OF INFORMATION

- 706.04 R
- A. Non-investigative contact with the media is allowed and encouraged. Officers may provide information of a general, or crime prevention nature, which is not specific to an ongoing investigation.
 - B. Investigative Information
 - 1. On routine incidents where no Command Post is established, media will be granted the same access as members of the general public. On private property, photography, film or videotape recording requires the permission of the owner or the owner's representative.
 - 2. The ranking officer at the scene of an incident shall, as soon as practical, provide media members with factual information pertaining to the event or crime.
 - 3. Information released at the scene should include basic facts and circumstances of the incident, including the location, date and time, injuries sustained, a general description of property taken or damaged, and a general description of how the incident occurred. A generic description of the evidence seized can be released (caliber of weapons, amounts and value of drugs will NOT be released).
 - 4. Additional information that may be appropriate for release at the scene includes the age and gender of the victims, and a description of any suspects or witnesses that the investigating officers may be trying to locate.
 - 5. When providing a suspect(s) description to the media, an effort should be made to include as much information (personal descriptors) as possible. If the only known descriptors are race and sex, the information should only be released if there is a significant public safety concern.
 - 6. The identity of a suspect will not be released prior to arrest, unless such information would aid in apprehending the suspect or serve to warn the public of potential danger.
 - 7. If the ranking officer giving the media release at the scene is unsure of the facts or the propriety of releasing the information, he/she shall refer the inquiry to the Bureau Commander, or his/her designee, to which the investigation will be assigned.
 - 8. If the media does not respond to the scene but is aware of the incident, they may call the police substation in the area where the incident occurred and ask that the scene supervisor contact them at his/her convenience.
 - C. Follow-up investigative information will be released by the Bureau Commander, or his/her designee, at the regularly scheduled 10 a.m. weekday media briefings held in City Hall.
 - D. Media requests for mug shots should be referred to the Crimes Against Persons Bureau Commander. The mug shots will not be released prior to that person having his/her first appearance in court, unless it is in the public interest to release it sooner.
 - E. Information that will NOT be released to the media includes:
 - 1. Information which, if released may jeopardize the investigation or interfere with the apprehension of a suspect(s) such as: the nature of 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;
 - 2. Information that may be of evidentiary value in criminal proceedings;
 - 3. The specific cause of death unless officially determined by the medical examiner;
 - 4. Names of Department members involved in critical incidents unless approved by the Chief of Police;
 - 5. The contents of a statement, or even the mere existence of an admission or a confession, refusal of the accused to make a statement, or refusal of the accused to submit to any examination or test;
 - 6. Personal opinions about the suspect, his/her guilt or innocence, mental status, anticipated plea, or the value of evidence against the accused;

7. Results of any forensic or laboratory tests including fingerprints, DNA, polygraphs, ballistics, etc.
 8. The identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to notification of the next of kin; if a next of kin is not reasonably able to be located, the Bureau Commander of the section conducting the investigation shall determine the method of release of the information;
 9. No information on victims of sexual assault offenses;
 10. The identity of any person questioned as a suspect, but not arrested; the name of any person arrested, unless that information is contained in the Arrest Summary; or the identity of any person where a pick-up has been issued, but no arrest made, unless such information would aid in apprehending the suspect or serve to warn the public of potential danger.
 11. Names, phone numbers or addresses of witnesses;
 12. The existence of an arrest warrant, or the application for issuance of such document prior to the actual serving; however, the District Attorney's Office may authorize the release of this information if it may aid in the apprehension of a suspect;
 13. The name and/or address of a suspect 13 years of age or younger at the time of the offense shall not be released under any circumstances and will be redacted from the Daily Arrest Report that is provided to the media;
 14. The name and/or address of juvenile suspects age 14 to 17 years of age will not be released unless such information would aid in apprehending the suspect or serve to warn the public of potential danger.
 15. Any information that relates to the credibility, reputation or criminal record of a suspect or arrestee in a criminal investigation
- F. WPD will not release information that impacts the investigations of other agencies or City Departments.
1. Once a suspect has been charged, media inquires in reference to that case will be referred to the District Attorney's Office or the City Attorney's Office.
 2. Any incidents/investigations turned over to the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, Kansas Highway Patrol, the District Attorney's Office, or any other investigative entity, the Wichita Police Department will only give the initial media release; any subsequent media inquires will be directed to the investigating agency until the investigation is completed.
 3. Information will not routinely be released on investigations that originate in, or belong to agencies, in other jurisdictions, unless coordinated with those agencies/jurisdictions.

706.05 SEARCH WARRANTS:

The media shall not be allowed to attend the execution of search warrants.

INFORMATION FROM POLICE RECORDS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM:

- 706.06
- A. Members of the Records Bureau or the Assistant to the Chief will print the "media report" portion of any criminal case from the E*Justice system upon request from the media.
 - B. The investigative case file on any crime will not be released to anyone, other than law enforcement agencies, except under court order.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND INTERVIEWS:

- 706.07
- A. Pictures may be taken in, or from, any area to which media members have been granted access. However, officers may restrict the use of flash, strobes and other high-intensity lighting when such use might hinder a police operation.
 - B. Officers will not interfere with a photographer taking a picture of a prisoner; however, a subject in custody of an Officer shall not be deliberately posed for the public or news media.
 - C. Officers will not deny media interviews with crime or disaster victims when the victims have expressed no reluctance to being interviewed. Officers may make exceptions when victims are injured, emotionally out-of-control, or otherwise not capable of making sound decisions.
 - D. Officers shall not order witnesses or victims to refrain from speaking to the media but may suggest such a course of action if such statements would be detrimental to an investigation.

- E. Requests to photograph or record Department events, facilities, or equipment in non-public areas or for any type of promotional purpose will be referred to the appropriate Division Commander.

INTERNAL MATTERS:

- 706.08
- A. The following information may be released to the media by the Chief of Police or the Duty Chief:
 - 1. Dates of employment of members of the Department;
 - 2. Tenure with the Department and current/previous assignments. (Unless assigned to the Undercover Section.)
 - 3. Pertinent biographical information on employees killed or seriously wounded in the line of duty.
 - B. Information pertaining to Professional Standards investigations will not be released, including the names of complainants, witnesses, accused officers, or the specifics of any disciplinary actions.
 - C. In the interest of public awareness, the Chief of Police may reveal the findings of any internal investigation upon its completion.
 - D. Personnel records and performance ratings of Department members shall not be released.