

Purpose

It is the purpose of the Cecil County Sheriff's Office to keep the public aware of events and activities that impact the community. To reach this goal the chain of command must be set and protocol defined.

Policy

It is the policy of the Cecil County Sheriff's Office that it shall inform the citizens and media of the events and activities that affect the community in order to foster a relationship of mutual trust, cooperation and respect.

I. General

A. Media Access Public Information -

1. Except as specifically restricted herein, includes teletype messages, accident reports, criminal incidents, miscellaneous reports, and arrest reports of a routine nature. **NOTE:** All restrictions should be considered carefully.
2. Shall be made available upon request to accredited news media representatives.

B. Sheriff's Office -

1. Does not issue press cards.
2. Is responsible for releasing information when it has primary jurisdiction in a multi-agency incident.

C. Public Information Officer - Chief Deputy/Director of Law Enforcement/Or Designee -

1. Is responsible for discussing Agency policy, and for making official comment on sensitive matters. (i.e. Internal Affairs Investigations)
2. Provides factual information to the media and coordinates requests for information between the media and Agency personnel.
3. May allow Agency facilities, when appropriate and requested, to be used by the media for recording interviews, news stories, and

documentaries. A member of the command staff will be contacted when this occurs.

4. Releases news as necessary.
 5. Arranges for and assists at news conferences.
 6. Plans, develops, writes and distributes informational releases and/or articles about programs, activities and Agency personnel.
 7. Assures that coordination occurs when that information impacts another agency.
 8. Shall verify validity of the media's credentials when questionable.
- D. Notification Required - The designated Public Information Officer will be contacted in a timely manner when any of the following occurs:
1. Homicide.
 2. Any death investigation where the circumstances are deemed suspicious and the criminal investigation division is responding.
 3. Death investigations where the deceased is a person of public significance.
 4. Burglaries and larcenies in excess of \$50,000.
 5. Disasters resulting in loss of life or extensive property damage.
 6. Traffic accidents that require an advanced accident investigator to respond.
 7. Aircraft or train accidents.
 8. School bus accidents.
 9. Missing children under 10 years of age.
 10. Missing persons when foul play is suspected.
 11. Extensive searches.
 12. Strikes, riots, disorders involving groups of people.
 13. Shootings involving citizens or deputies.

14. Bomb threats, or where a device is found.
15. Hostage and barricade situations.
16. Any incident involving persons who, by their position in society, are of interest to the public.
17. Deaths of persons in custody and/or serious injury.
18. Any incidents that would be classified as a hate crime/incident by UCR guidelines.
19. It is always prudent to notify the designated public information officer when in doubt. This would be for an unusual occurrence that is newsworthy, a happening or event that is internal or external which causes interest or concern to the public, i.e. large scale power outage, severe flooding, bridge collapse, heavy weather.

The notification to the designated public information officer will be made by the Criminal Investigation Division (CID) supervisor on incidents where CID personnel are responding. The duty officer will contact the designated public information officer on incidents where CID personnel are not responding. The notification to the designated public information officer should be made in a timely manner once the basic incident facts have been obtained.

E. Agency Personnel -

1. Shall adequately and courteously explain any denial of information (e.g., privacy rights, safety, HIPPA laws, etc.)
2. Shall not withhold, delay or selectively release information to favor a particular media representative or agency. However, specific inquiries made independently may be honored at the time of inquiry.
3. Agency members shall not speak to the media as a representative of the Cecil County Sheriff's Office without authorization from the designated public information officer or a member of the Command Staff.

II. Investigation Information

A. Releasable Information -

1. Type or nature of incident.

2. Location, date, time, medical status (life-threatening, non-life threatening), damages, and description of how incident occurred.
3. Amount, type and value of property taken.
4. Victim's identity and general address (ex: hundred block only).

EXCEPTIONS: See "Unreleasable Information" in this subsection regarding Arrest Information.

5. Requests for aid in locating evidence, complainants, missing persons, or suspects (race may be released as descriptive information in such cases).

B. Arrest and Charging Information Releasable Information -

1. The accused adult's name, age, description, residence, employment, and marital status.
2. The charge as contained in the complaint, warrant, indictment or information.
3. The name, age, and address of a juvenile **ONLY** when charged as an adult or waived to adult status.
4. The fact that an unnamed juvenile was taken into custody on delinquent charges, including sex, age, general area of a juvenile's residence, and substance of the charge.
5. Identity of the investigating and arresting officers, agency, and length of the investigation.

EXCEPTION: Undercover deputies or deputies involved in shootings, without approval of the Sheriff or his designee.

6. Circumstances immediately surrounding the arrest, including:
 - (a) Time and place of arrest.
 - (b) Pursuit information, if applicable.
 - (c) Resistance, and injuries sustained as a result.
 - (d) Possession and use of weapons by suspect or police.
 - (e) Description of items or contraband seized.
7. Amount of bond, and place of detention.

8. Chronological arrest book information, which is open to inspection.

C. Unreleasable Information –

1. Identity of sex crime victim, adult or juvenile, or related information which may divulge the victim's identity.
2. Identity of juvenile suspect, defendant or respondent in any case over which the Juvenile Court of Cecil County has jurisdiction.
3. Identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to notification of next of kin.

EXCEPTION: When notification has been attempted but is not possible within a reasonable time (as determined on a case-by-case basis by the Criminal Investigation Lieutenant).

4. Specific cause of death, until determined by the State Medical Examiner.
5. Investigative and evidentiary information regarding a criminal case.
6. Contents of suicide notes.
7. Personal opinion not founded on fact.
8. Unofficial statements concerning personnel or internal affairs matters.
9. Home addresses and telephone numbers of Agency members.
10. Witness names.
11. After the incident, but prior to arrest, or during investigation:
 - (a) Suspect's identity or location except that the existence of the suspect may be acknowledged without further comment. **EXCEPTION:** After a warrant has been obtained, a suspect may be identified to assist in apprehension.
 - (b) The results of any investigative procedure (e.g., lineup, etc.).
However, the fact that the investigative methods were

- (c) performed may be acknowledged without further comment. Information, which if prematurely disclosed, would significantly interfere with an investigation or apprehension. This includes unchecked leads and specifics of method of operation (MO) details known only to the police or suspect.
- (d) Identity of a victim/witness, if such disclosure would prejudice an investigation to any significant degree, or if it would place the victim in clear personal danger.

12. After arrest and formal charging:

- (a) Prior criminal record, character, or reputation of defendants.
- (b) Existence or contents of confessions, admissions or statements made by the defendant, or failure to make such.
- (c) Results of defendant's tests or the defendant's refusal or failure to submit to any tests.
- (d) Identity, credibility, character, statements or expected testimony of victims or witnesses.
- (e) Opinions about the defendant's guilt or innocence, the merits of the case, or what is expected to be used in court.
- (f) Possibility of a guilty plea, plea-bargaining or other dispositions.
- (g) Reports, transcripts or summaries of proceedings from which the press and public have been excluded by judicial order.

III. Special Considerations

A. Crime/Incident Scene Access -

1. With regard to general access:

- (a) Closer access may be provided for media personnel, equipment and vehicles than for the general public, provided it does not interfere with the Sheriff's Office operations or general traffic flow, or unless a danger of personal injury exists.

2. With regard to direct access:

- (a) Media access may be allowed only after all known evidence has been processed and on-site investigation is completed.
- (b) Permission must be obtained from owners or their

representatives when photographs or video are to be taken on private property.

3. When necessary, the deputy in charge may designate a preliminary press area.

B. Recording/Televising/Photographing -

1. In public places, is allowed, as long as it does not interfere with the operations of the Sheriff's Office,

Members may:

- (a) Facilitate or assist the media as long as it does not jeopardize or compromise the investigation or prosecution.
 - (b) Take protective action (e.g., covering a body, etc.) as long as they provide a courteous and logical explanation for such action.
2. Is permissible of suspects/accused at incident scenes or other public places.

Members shall not pose:

- (a) The suspect/accused for photographs, telecasts or interviews.
- (b) With the suspect/accused or agree on a pre-arranged time and place to be photographed, televised or interviewed.

C. Photographs -

1. May be released, when appropriate.

D. Confidential/Internal Investigations –

1. Confidential intelligence or investigative information from the Criminal Investigation Division will not be released except by express permission of the Chief Deputy, the Sheriff or designee.
2. Sensitive or investigative information from the Internal Affairs Section will not be released except with written permission from the Sheriff or designee.

E. Requests by Citizens for Information Restriction –

1. **When** a citizen requests that information on an incident not be

released or reported to the media, members shall explain that police reports may be considered public information and accessible to the media. Members shall explain that such a request will be noted in the official incident report, but that the media shall make the decision whether or not to publish unrestricted information.