



Sheridan Police Department
Policies and Procedures
23.1 Replaces 302.1
Chapter 23 – Media
Section 1 – Media

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Signature:

An informed public is essential to the healthy functioning of democracy. The news media keeps the public informed of government activities and frequently shapes public opinion. The Sheridan Police Department will work with the news media to provide accurate information on department administration and operations to foster a relationship of mutual trust, cooperation, and respect with the members of our community.

23.1.1 News Media Relationship

- A. The Sheridan Police Department will cooperate fully and impartially with news media representatives in their efforts to gather factual public information pertaining to the activity of the department.
- B. The department will assist media efforts as long as these activities do not unduly interfere with the department's operation, infringe upon individual rights, or violate the law.
- C. The department is committed to informing the community and news media of events handled by or involving the department.
- D. The department attempts to be responsive to the media and public interest in department operations and situations by:
 - 1. Helping media personnel in covering both routine news stories and at scenes of incidents;
 - 2. Making someone available to respond to news media inquiries;
 - 3. Preparing and distributing news releases;
 - 4. Arranging for and/or assisting at news conferences; and
 - 5. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about department investigations and operations according to appropriate statutes and other restrictions.

23.1.2 Media Briefings

- A. The daily activity summary is produced every business day morning and placed on the police department website for public access.
 - 1. The primary person responsible for the activity summary is the public information officer (PIO) appointed by the chief of police. The PIO will designate another person to conduct the briefing in his or her absence.
- B. Special situation media briefings will be held to update the media as to events which are not routinely disseminated through the regular briefing.
 - 1. Examples of police activity requiring a special situation briefing may include a police related shooting, a hostage situation, a homicide, or any circumstance demanding

- immediate coverage by the media to alert the public to a potentially dangerous circumstance (i.e. - an escapee, a toxic spill, etc.).
2. All local media will be advised of the time and place that special briefings will occur.
 3. The chief of police or his or her designee will conduct the special situation briefing.
 4. In most cases, a bureau commander and/or the investigator in charge of the case, as well as any other knowledgeable personnel, will be present with the chief of police to provide additional background information on the case.
 5. When appropriate, a general press release detailing the incident, with correctly spelled names and releasable information shall be made available for media representatives.
- C. Police personnel may participate in personal interviews on police department business related information, only as approved by this policy or the chief of police. Personal interviews on topics outside the scope of the department, which will not reasonably bring discredit or bring controversy to the department, may be conducted without the department being notified.
- D. Ranking officers at incident scenes may release information of a factual nature to the media as governed by this policy.
1. Where the employee is unsure of the facts or confidentiality of information, he or she shall refer the inquiry up the chain of command.
 2. The officer will conduct on-scene briefings as time permits and as long as such a briefing does not interfere with the officer completing his or her duty.
 3. The officer in charge of crashes may release general details of the crash as long as such release does not violate provision of this policy. Such information may include the number of vehicles involved, the extent of injuries, vehicle descriptions, etc.

23.1.3 Cooperation with Media

- A. During normal business hours, the public information officer will attempt to comply with media requests for information by conferring with the appropriate person in order to obtain the requested information. Sources of information include the chief of police, the officer in charge of a particular case, the appropriate bureau commander, or a shift supervisor.
- B. The on-duty supervisor will handle all media requests after normal business hours.
- C. News media representatives will have reasonable access to the public information officer and/or the chief of police.
- D. The department will assist all local, national, and international news organizations. Failure of news media personnel, unknown by the department, to present authorized identification may provide grounds for restricting access to incident scenes.
- E. Public information may be provided to media representatives by phone if the identity of the representative is known or can be authenticated.
- F. When information must be denied to a media representative, the basis of that denial shall be fully and courteously explained.
- G. Unless a release of information would compromise an investigation or is otherwise restricted from release by law (see section 14.4.4), the following types of information involving criminal matters are authorized for release to news media personnel:
1. The type of event or crime and when and where it occurred, to include a brief synopsis of known facts concerning the incident including:
 - a. General information concerning property loss;

- b. Physical injuries or the event of death. Normally the department will not release the name(s) of the deceased and will refer media representatives to the county coroner to ensure the next of kin has been notified.
 2. Information concerning the type of investigation, its length, the number of officers involved, the identity of any assisting agencies and the name of the officer in charge of the investigation (except the name of any undercover officer will not be released).
 3. The identity of the victim or person who reported the crime (name, sex, age, and address) unless the release of such information is likely to pose a threat to his or her personal safety or compromise a future criminal investigation.
 - a. If the victim or complainant requests that his or her name not be used in the media release, this request will be given to the media. The media is not obligated to respect the request.
 - b. The department is reluctant to release names of children or victims of domestic violence. When media personnel request the information, the officer conducting the briefing will supply the information unless articulable reasons exist for denying the requested information (see section 14.4.4).
 4. Information concerning the existence of suspects or:
 - a. The arrested person's name (if an adult), age, residence, and other factual background information;
 - b. The nature, substance, or text of the charge(s);
 - c. Custody status, amount of bond, scheduled court dates, and the place of the suspect's detention;
 - d. If a warrant has been issued, but not executed, and the officer anticipates that the public may provide information to assist in locating the person, suspect information including photographs may be released to the media to help locate the individual.
 - e. Suspect's or accused persons in custody shall not be posed or arrangements made for photographs, telecasts, or interviews, nor shall departmental personnel pose with the suspect or accused person in custody.
 - f. Arrestee's photos are created and maintained by the Sheridan County Detention Center. Their policy shall govern photo releases.
 5. The circumstances surrounding the arrest including the date, time, and place of arrest, number of officers involved, whether pursuit or resistance was encountered, possession or use of weapons, and the descriptions of any items seized in connection with the arrest.
- H. Members of the department will not release the following types of information:
 1. The existence of information concerning the character or reputation of the accused.
 2. The existence or contents of any confession, admission, or statements of the accused without approval of the prosecuting attorney.
 3. The performance of any examination or tests by the accused or failure to submit to an examination or test.
 4. Comments on the expected testimony or credibility of any witnesses.
 5. Any opinion as to the innocence or guilt of the accused, the merits of the case, the possibility of any plea or negotiations or the investigative value of any evidence.
 6. The home address or home telephone number of any department employee without the consent of that employee.

- 7. Information received from other law enforcement agencies without agreement from the other agency.
- I. Public information shall be released to the media as promptly as circumstances allow in an impartial, courteous and objective manner.
- J. Written press statements shall be released only following approval of the chief of police or his or her designee.

23.1.4 Media Access to Crime Scenes / Critical Incident Areas / Crash Scenes

- A. At the scene of any event of public interest, members of the Sheridan Police Department will permit members of the news media to conduct interviews, take photographs or film, or otherwise perform their assigned tasks, provided their activity does not interfere with the mission of the police, fire, medical or other emergency service workers.
- B. Members of the media will be allowed access to a crime scene as soon as practical after the scene has been processed by the detective division and the supervisor of the detective division has determined that no evidence will be lost or damaged by allowing that access. This will require the permission of the property owner, in the event that the scene is not on public property.
- C. Members of the media will be allowed access to critical incident areas during an incident (i.e. - hostage situations, chemical spill, etc.) as long as their presence does not interfere with the operation or place any lives in danger. Additionally the media representative must pose no danger of evidence destruction or an escalation of the situation (such as themselves being taken hostage).
- D. At the scene of a major crime such as a hostage or barricaded situation, the officer in charge shall designate a primary press area as early as possible and as close to the scene as safety and operational requirements allow.
- E. Media access to and movement within fire lines shall be controlled by the fire officer in charge.
- F. In those instances where more than one agency is involved in an incident, the agency having primary jurisdiction will be responsible for releasing and/or coordinating the release of information to the news media.

23.1.5 Equal Access

- A. All information that is releasable to a media representative is releasable to all interested media representatives. Under no circumstances will department personnel give special preference to one (1) media representative to the exclusion of others. Unauthorized release of information to members of the media to gain favor, political influence, or personal gain is strictly prohibited.
- B. When any release or briefing is planned, the designated information officer will make every reasonable effort to contact all local media representatives.

23.1.6 Ride Alongs

- A. Members of the media will be allowed to ride up to eight (8) hours every six (6) months with a police officer who has completed his or her trial service period.
- B. During the ride along, members of the media will:
 - 1. Abide by all City of Sheridan and Sheridan Police Department policies regarding the use of safety equipment;

2. Abide by all federal and state laws pertaining to the release of information imposed on law enforcement obtained during the ride along;
 3. Abide by police department guidelines for the release of information if the release of the information will hinder an ongoing investigation;
 4. Abide by all legal directions given by police department personnel;
 5. Not enter private property without the permission of the owner;
 6. Identify themselves as members of the media if their identity is questioned;
 7. Notify the chief of police or designee if they desire to do a ride along for a specific story or research project and the purpose of the story or research; and
 8. Release to the police department any video recording, audio recording, or photographs if such material is needed as evidence. This material will be returned to its source when it is no longer needed as evidence.
- C. Permission for a media ride along must be approved by a member of the department with the rank of sergeant or above.
1. The rider must sign a waiver and release form prior to being allowed to ride.
 2. The department will conduct a check of local contacts, a local warrant check, and an N.C.I.C. warrant check prior to the ride along.
 - a. Grounds for excluding a rider may include a felony conviction or a current warrant for arrest.
 - b. Prior convictions or law enforcement contacts for minor criminal offenses (excluding traffic violations) and other criminal history information may affect eligibility and will be determined on a case by case basis by the patrol supervisor.
- D. During media ride alongs, members of the Sheridan Police Department will follow guidelines of this policy concerning the release of information. The shift supervisor will review this policy with the rider prior to the ride along.

23.1.7 General Information

- A. News releases concerning incidents involving agency policy, new department programs, or investigations of an internal nature will only be made by the chief of police or his or her designee. Any and all inquiries relating to internal investigations within the department and the status of such will be referred to the chief of police.
- B. Inquiries concerning departmental policies, procedures, practices or relationship with other criminal justice agencies will be referred to the chief of police. Similarly the chief will coordinate all responses to inquiries or release of information pertaining to department involvement with other public service agencies (i.e. - fire department, coroner, city attorney, etc.).
- C. Requests for information on incidents/investigations under the primary jurisdiction of another law enforcement agency will be referred to that agency. Members will not confirm, deny, or release any related information.
- D. Employees of the police department will not comment or give interviews on department or city operations, policies, procedures, or ongoing events connected with department or city operations, without prior approval from a bureau commander or the chief of police.
- E. As media personnel are not required to abide by departmental directives, employees who are confronted with media inquiries contrary to policy will politely decline to comment, and

remain courteous with media representatives while directing the media person to the person authorized to release the information.

- F. Employees shall be courteous and professional in dealing with members of the news media. Difficulties in dealing with specific members of the media shall be referred to the employee's supervisor for resolution.
- G. To achieve more effective working relationships between the department and media personnel, the department will involve media representatives in the development of significant changes in policies and procedures relating to the public information function. These reviews will be on an as-needed basis or following a policy revision.
- H. The news media may photograph and report anything they observe when legally present at an emergency scene. Where publication of such coverage would interfere with an official investigation or place victims, suspects, or others in jeopardy, the withholding of publication is dependent upon a cooperative media, not on department censorship. Under such circumstances, officers should advise the news media or their superiors of the possible consequences of publication: however, officers may not interfere with media activities within the confines of the law.