

Media Relations

323.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidelines for the release of official department information to the media. It also addresses coordinating media access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies and other law enforcement activities.

323.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Easton Police Department to protect the privacy rights of individuals, while releasing non-confidential information to the media regarding topics of public concern. Information that has the potential to negatively affect investigations will not be released.

323.3 RESPONSIBILITIES

The ultimate authority and responsibility for the release of information to the media shall remain with the Chief of Police. In situations not warranting immediate notice to the Chief of Police and in situations where the Chief of Police has given prior approval, Commanders, Shift Supervisors and designated Public Information Officers (PIOs) may prepare and release information to the media in accordance with this policy and applicable laws regarding confidentiality.

323.4 PROVIDING ADVANCE INFORMATION

To protect the safety and rights of department members 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 media, nor should media representatives be invited to be present at such actions except with the prior approval of the Chief of Police.

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

323.5 MEDIA REQUESTS

Any media request for information or access to a law enforcement incident shall be referred to the PIO, or if unavailable, to the first available supervisor. Prior to releasing any information to the media, members shall consider the following:

- (a) 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 PIO.
- (b) In situations involving multiple agencies or government departments, 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.

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- (c) Under no circumstance should any member of this department make any comment to the media regarding any law enforcement incident not involving this department without prior approval of the Chief of Police. Under these circumstances the member should direct the media to the agency handling the incident.

323.6 ACCESS

Authorized media representatives shall be provided access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies and other law enforcement activities as required by law.

Access by the media is subject to the following conditions:

- (a) The media representative shall produce valid media credentials that shall be prominently displayed at all times while in areas otherwise closed to the public.
- (b) Media representatives should be prevented from interfering and may be removed for interfering with emergency operations and criminal investigations.
 - 1. Based upon available resources, reasonable effort should be made to provide a safe staging area for the media that is near the incident and that will not interfere with emergency or criminal investigation operations. All information released to the media should be coordinated through the PIO or other designated spokesperson.
- (c) Media interviews with individuals who are in custody should not be permitted without the approval of the Chief of Police and the express written consent of the person in custody.
- (d) No member of this department who is under investigation shall be subjected to media visits or interviews without the consent of the involved member.

323.6.1 CRITICAL OPERATIONS

A critical incident or tactical operation should be handled in the same manner as a crime scene, except the media should not be permitted within the inner perimeter of the incident, subject to any restrictions as determined by the supervisor in charge. Department members shall not jeopardize a critical incident or tactical operation in order to accommodate the media. All comments to the media shall be coordinated through a supervisor or the PIO.

323.6.2 TEMPORARY FLIGHT RESTRICTIONS

Whenever the presence of media or other aircraft pose a threat to public or member safety or significantly hamper incident operations, the field supervisor should consider requesting a Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR.) All requests for a TFR should be routed through the Shift Supervisor. The TFR request should include specific information regarding the perimeter and altitude necessary for the incident and should be requested through the appropriate control tower. If the control tower is not known, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) should be contacted (14 CFR 91.137.)

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323.7 CONFIDENTIAL OR RESTRICTED INFORMATION

It shall be the responsibility of the PIO to ensure that confidential or restricted information is not inappropriately released to the media (see the Records Maintenance and Release and Personnel Records policies). When in doubt, authorized and available legal counsel should be consulted prior to releasing any information.

323.7.1 EMPLOYEE INFORMATION

The identities of officers involved in shootings or other critical incidents may only be released to the media upon the consent of the Chief of Police or upon a formal request filed and processed in accordance with the Maryland Public Information Act (see the Records Maintenance and Release Policy.)

Any requests for copies of related reports or additional information regarding the identity of officers involved in shootings or other critical incidents, shall be referred to the the Custodian of Records, or if unavailable, the Support Services Commander. Such requests will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Maryland Public Information Act (see the Records Maintenance and Release Policy.)

323.7.2 GUIDELINES FOR THE TYPES OF INFORMATION NOT TO BE RELEASED

- (a) Information on any covert operations or covert officers.
- (b) Personal information of any Easton Police Department employee.
- (c) Any information on citizens providing information to the police unless they consent to being identified (complainants, informants, concerned citizens.)
- (d) Any juvenile information.
 - 1. Information may be released on an incident a juvenile is involved in; however, care must be taken so that no particular person can be linked to the crime.
 - 2. Information may be released on a missing juvenile upon receiving consent from the parent or guardian.
 - 3. Information may be released on a juvenile who has been officially charged as an adult with a crime.
- (e) The identity of a victim of a child abuse or sex crime.
- (f) The identity of any person seriously injured or killed in any incident will be withheld until positive identification is made and the next of kin notified.
- (g) No information concerning the cause and manner of death will be released without an official ruling by the State Medical Examiner.
- (h) Suicide cases:
 - 1. Generally, press releases are not completed however, certain circumstance may dictate that it is in the best interest of the public or Department to release certain information.

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- (i) Care must be taken when releasing information on stolen property; for example, it is better to use general identifiers such as: cash, jewelry, or drugs without specifics in order to withhold information from the public indicating a building may contain a large amount of goods, which would make it more enticing to criminals.
- (j) Any information which may interfere with pending or future investigations.
- (k) Any information on investigative techniques such as the use of surveillance, body wires, computer forensics, GPS tracking, etc.
- (l) The results of forensic analysis.
- (m) Information will not be released concerning statements made by any arrestee including confessions.
- (n) Any polygraph information including whether a person participated in one.
- (o) Any information concerning a person's credibility or character.
- (p) Any information concerning the lack of police action.
- (q) Any information that would endanger the life or physical safety of any individual

323.8 RELEASE OF INFORMATION

The Department may routinely release information to the media without receiving a specific request. This may include media releases regarding critical incidents, information of public concern, updates regarding significant incidents or requests for public assistance in solving crimes or identifying suspects. This information may also be released through the department website or other electronic data sources.

323.8.1 GUIDELINES FOR TYPE OF INFORMATION TO BE RELEASED

- (a) The type or nature of any incident.
- (b) The location, date and time of any incident.
- (c) A brief synopsis of how an incident occurred.
- (d) Description of any stolen items.
- (e) Description of any suspects.
- (f) Description of any suspect vehicle.
- (g) The name, age, city of residence, of any adult charged with a criminal, municipal, or civil charge.
- (h) The nature of any such charges.
- (i) The disposition of the person after arrest.
- (j) The amount of any bail or bond.
- (k) The age of victim.
- (l) The approximate quantity of drug seizures.
- (m) Stolen property recoveries.

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- (n) Whether the crime scene was processed for evidence.

323.8.2 PRESS RELEASES

The night patrol Shift Supervisor will be responsible for preparing a daily written press release, which will be a written summation of Easton Police activity of the last 24 hours. The Supervisor preparing the press release will consider:

- (a) Any arrests made including a brief synopsis of the case, name, age, and address of the person charged and charges.
- (b) Any major traffic crashes including a brief synopsis of the incident, names of drivers and occupants, ages, addresses, description of vehicles, whether any charges were filed.
- (c) Any open investigations where soliciting assistance from the public may be of assistance including a brief synopsis of the incident and a description of any suspects involved or property missing. If assistance is requested, include agency contact information.
- (d) Supervisors will make every effort to credit assisting public safety agencies if applicable.
- (e) Any other events, which may have or will significantly impact the public.