

**Stevensville Police Department  
General Orders**

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**Chapter 27**

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**Public Information**

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<b>Date Effective</b> 5/10/21	<b>By The Order of:</b>	<b>M. Sosa, Jr., Chief of Police</b>
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**27.1.1 COMMITMENT TO THE COMMUNITY**

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**CALEA Standard: 54.1.1**

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**Public Information Function**

The Stevensville Police Department is committed to informing the community of events that occur within the jurisdiction of the Agency and events that involve the Agency. Law enforcement agencies must have the support of their communities in order to operate efficiently. By providing the public with information on Departmental administration and operations, the Stevensville Police Department can foster a relationship of mutual trust, cooperation, and respect. In order to facilitate this commitment to the public, the Stevensville Police Department has established a public information function to include:

- ☐ Assisting news personnel in covering routine news stories and at major crime scenes
- ☐ Being available for on-call responses to the news media
- ☐ Preparing and distributing agency news releases
- ☐ Arranging for and assisting at news conferences
- ☐ Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects
- ☐ Assisting in crisis situations within the agency
- ☐ Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential investigations and operations, Agency activities, and personnel issues
- ☐ Procedures for releasing information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort
- ☐ Assisting in the release of information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort

**Public Affairs Responsibility**

The Chief of Police will act as the Agency's Public Information Officer and may designate other officers to serve in that capacity as backups. Additionally, other employees may be designated to serve as Agency spokespersons for specific situations or events. The Public Information Officer holds primary responsibility for coordinating the public information function. The Public Information Officer or designee shall be responsible for coordinating the release of information

pertaining to crime incidents and operational activities of the Agency. The Public Information Officer or designee is on-call 24-hours a day. The Public Information Officer shall be contacted when any of the following incidents have occurred and a news release prepared:

- ☐ Homicide
- ☐ Any incident, crime, catastrophe, special event or an unusual occurrence of a magnitude that will create a high interest by the community
- ☐ Any incident or occurrence in which the Chief of Police or his designee feels the dissemination of information is in the best interest of the community

The on-duty supervisor has the authority to call out the Public Information Officer for any situation deemed necessary.

### **Procedures for News Releases**

The Stevensville Police Department shall cooperate fully and impartially with representatives of the news media in their efforts to gather and disseminate information consistent with established procedures. Full cooperation between the news media and law enforcement agencies in the prompt and accurate dissemination of information to the public is a continuing goal. These procedures are intended to protect the delicate balance of rights and duties of both the news media and the Agency. They are also intended to provide basic control required by the Stevensville Police Department in order to protect its own physical security, the security of its employees and the rights of suspects, arrestees, and witnesses related to a crime or other Agency-related incidents. Procedures for news releases include:

- ☐ News releases will be prepared and disseminated as necessitated by specific occurrences
- ☐ Subject matter for news releases will cover investigative reports, arrests, information on outstanding warrants and wanted individuals, traffic fatalities, and information about newsworthy incidents
- ☐ News releases will be disseminated to all legitimate local news media in a way that ensures that first-release information is equally available
- ☐ All news releases shall be prepared on the approved Stevensville Police Department news release form
- ☐ Any information concerning Stevensville Police Department personnel shall not be released without the permission of the Chief of Police or designee.

### **Personnel Authorized to Release Information**

Specific personnel are authorized to release information within the guidelines of this directive as follows:

- ☐ At the scene of an incident, information may be released by the Chief of Police, a Supervisor, or a designee regarding the particular incident.

- ☐ Information on Department personnel matters or discipline shall only be released by the Chief of Police or a designee.
- ☐ Information concerning Agency plans, policies, or administrative changes shall only be released by the Chief of Police or a designee.
- ☐ A Supervisor or designee is authorized to release information pursuant to the guidelines set forth in Chapter 34, Section 34.2.2, of the Stevensville Police Department General Orders. The news media shall be entitled to the same information as the public.
- ☐ Information concerning a specific ongoing criminal investigation may be released by Chief of Police or supervisory personnel.
- ☐ Non-supervisory personnel are prohibited from releasing information to the media without permission from the Chief of Police.
- ☐ Select, Agency personnel have been trained as Public Information Officers (PIOs) in order to aid the Chief of Police on an *as-needed* basis. The PIO shall make the determination when supplemental PIO staffing is needed.

### **Unavailability of the Public Information Officer**

It is the responsibility of the Chief of Police to designate a trained PIO to handle all PIO responsibilities anytime the Chief of Police has prior knowledge that he or she will be unavailable. However, there will also be instances during which the Chief of Police will not be available unexpectedly.

In the event of a pre-planned absence from PIO duties, the Chief of Police shall:

- ☐ Ensure the availability of a trained PIO to maintain continuous PIO coverage for the Agency
- ☐ Notify the media and the Agency the name of the designee, along with the starting and ending date(s) of temporary coverage
- ☐ When the Chief of Police has been contacted by an on-duty supervisor regarding a newsworthy incident and is unexpectedly not available, the following shall occur:
  - ☐ The Chief of Police shall authorize the Supervisor to act as a trained PIO
  - ☐ The Supervisor shall be responsible if requested, for preparing a news release at the direction of the Chief of Police and forwarding a copy to the Chief of Police.
  - ☐ The PIO designee shall respond appropriately to the newsworthy incident and shall ensure a copy of the news release is forwarded to the Chief of Police.

### **Release of Information**

The following information is available upon request to news media personnel in criminal matters, unless such a release would compromise an investigation:

- ☐ The time, date, location and nature of a violation or apparent violation of the law
- ☐ The name, sex, age, address, employment and alleged violation of law of a person arrested, charged or indicted, if 16 years of age or older
- ☐ The contents of "911" and other emergency telephone calls received by the Agency, except such contents that reveal the name, address, telephone number, or other information that may identify the caller, victim, or witness

- ☐ The contents of communications between or among employees of the Agency that are broadcast over the public airways
- ☐ The name, sex, age, and address of a complaining witness unless the release of the information is likely to pose a threat to the mental health, physical health, or personal safety of the complaining witness, or compromise a continuing or future criminal investigation
- ☐ Information provided from out of state agencies meeting the contributing state's guidelines for release of information
- ☐ Service agencies that have assisted the Agency with an incident should always be recognized in a news release. The agency that has the primary jurisdiction will be responsible for coordinating the release of information.
- ☐ The following information *should not* be released to the news media:
  - ☐ Statements related to the character or reputation of an accused person or a prospective witness
  - ☐ Admissions, confessions, or the contents of a statement or alibi attributable to an accused person
  - ☐ The performance on the results of any tests, or the refusal of the accused to take a test or to participate in a lineup, except that which is a matter of public record
  - ☐ Statements concerning the credibility or anticipated testimony of prospective witnesses
  - ☐ The possibility of a plea of guilty to charges or to a lesser offense, or any other disposition
  - ☐ Opinions concerning the evidence or any argument in the case whether or not it is anticipated that the evidence or argument will be used at trial
  - ☐ The contents of any note or message left by the victim of a suicide

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### **27.1.2 MEDIA PARTICIPATION IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

#### **CALEA Standard: 54.1.2**

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The contents of this directive and all subsequent changes shall be furnished to all local news media and to other media upon request. News agencies are invited and encouraged to participate in the formulation of policy and procedures relating to the news media by providing comments and suggestions.

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### **27.1.3 SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS AT INCIDENT SCENES**

#### **CALEA Standard: 54.1.3**

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#### **News Media Credentials**

The Stevensville Police Department neither issues nor revokes media credentials. The Stevensville Police Department recognizes valid identification from all news agencies. Due to the public purpose served by these agencies, media privileges are extended to properly identified representatives; however, news media privileges will not be extended to unaffiliated (free-lance) writers, photographers, or other members of the public.

If an Officer feels an individual no longer should be granted press privileges due to the conduct of the news media representative, the Officer should make a full written report to the Chief of Police through the chain of command. The Chief of Police will determine whether contact with the media organization is appropriate.

#### **Scenes of Major Fires, Natural Disasters, or Other Catastrophic Events**

Media access to fire scenes and the release of information concerning the operation shall be controlled by the fire official in charge. Officers at the scene shall confer with the fire official in charge and assist in establishing an observation point from which media personnel may observe and photograph proceedings.

Media access and the release of information concerning other incidents at which Officers are serving in an assisting role (e.g., hazardous material spills) will be the responsibility of the official in charge at the scene.

#### **Access to Crime Scenes**

Crime scenes should be determined and clearly marked with crime scene tape. Agency personnel are to extend every courtesy to news media representatives who are actively covering an incident. However, unless specifically authorized by the Chief of Police or ranking scene supervisor, and with appropriate escort, media representatives shall not be allowed inside an established crime scene. Access to crime scenes after those scenes have been released from law enforcement control is at the discretion of the owner of the scene and media representatives.

If circumstances necessitate, the Chief of Police or designated spokesperson may establish a designated media area or areas near an established scene. Such areas should sufficiently provide for media equipment without interfering with law enforcement operations.