WEST NORRITON TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPARTMENT

Subject: News Media Releases		Policy # 5.1.23
Accreditation N/A		
Effective Date: January 1, 2008	Revised Date:	
By Authority Of: Chief A. Dale Mabry	Signature: ADMabry	

5.1.23 NEWS MEDIA RELEASES

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of this directive is to establish regulations and set forth procedures for the release of police information to the news media, which will encourage the free flow of newsworthy communications, while fulfilling the Police Department's duty to protect the rights of accused persons, victims, witnesses and others coming within the department's purview.

B. POLICY

The Police Department must cultivate the trust, support and active cooperation of the public it serves, in order to function efficiently. Maintenance of amicable police-media relations contributes to a better public understanding of police related matters.

It is the policy of this Police Department to cooperate as fully as possible with all accredited news media in the dissemination of police information, consistent with the Department's obligations to prevent the release of prejudicial information and information which would be detrimental to the protection and privacy of victims and witnesses.

C. REGULATIONS

1. Information which may be released to the news media with discretion:

   a. The names of any adult person arrested, age, sex, address, employment, marital status and similar, relevant biographical information.
   b. The substance of the charge, complaint or indictment.
   c. The identity of the investigating and arresting agency and length of the investigation.
   d. The identity of the investigating and/or arresting officers, providing such information does not jeopardize operations or compromise assigned personnel.
   e. The circumstances immediately surrounding the arrest, including time and place of arrest, resistance, pursuit, possession and use of weapons and a brief description of items seized at the time of arrest, if relevant.
   f. The name of any victim, address, age, sex, next of kin (if pertinent) and property taken. Not to include victims of rape or other sex offenses.
   g. The type of force used against the victim of a crime and the general extent of injuries to a victim or assailant.

2. Information which ***should not*** be released to the news media:

    a. Opinions related to character, reputation, credibility, mental status or anticipated testimony of an accused person or prospective witness.
    b. Prior criminal record of an accused person.
    c. Admissions, confessions or the contents of any statement or alibi attributable to an accused person; refusal or failure of an accused person to make a statement.
    d. The performance or results of any investigative procedures or tests; the refusal of an accused person to submit to a test or to participate in a line-up.
    e. Opinions as to an accused person's guilt or the possibility of a plea of guilty to the offenses charged or to a lesser offense or any other possible disposition.
    f. Opinions concerning any evidence or any argument in a case, whether or not it is anticipated that the evidence or argument will be used at trial.
    g. Name and address of any witness to a crime.
    h. Name and address or opinions as to the character or reputation of any subject sought for a crime, but not yet formally charged, unless help is wanted for the news media to aid in the apprehensions of the accused or to advise the public as to potential danger.
    i. Race of any person, unless part of a general description given to the news media to aid in locating a person being sought for a crime or other official reason.
    j. Name, address and present location of any victim of a sex offense.
    k. The contents of any suicide note.

3. Release of information concerning juveniles charged in criminal incidents:

    a. Information concerning juveniles accused of criminal acts may be released to the new media if and only if:

        i. The juvenile is fourteen (14) years of age or older at the time of the incident;
        ii. The juvenile has been adjudicated delinquent by the Court of Common Pleas:
        iii. The juvenile has been convicted by a Court as a result of an act or acts which include elements of rape, kidnapping, murder, robbery, arson, burglary or other acts involving the use of or threat of serious bodily harm.

        Exception - If the juvenile has not yet been adjudicated delinquent on one of the above charges, but is fourteen (14) years of age or older and has previously been adjudicated delinquent on one of the charges listed, information may be released to the media.

        Such prior adjudication shall be determined by the officer's making a physical check with juvenile authorities before releasing information to the media.

    b. Information which ***may*** be released to the news media, ***with discretion***, if all of the above criteria are met.

        i. Name, address and age of juvenile.

ii. The offense or offenses charged.
iii. Disposition of the case.

4. Photographing and Releasing Photographs of Prisoners or Suspects

   a. Members of the Police Department will not prevent the photographing of defendants when they are in public places outside a court room. They will neither encourage nor discourage pictures or television, but must not pose the accused.
   b. Police Department photographs of a suspect may be released ***only*** if doing so does not jeopardize an investigation and if a valid law enforcement function is served.

5. Release of Identity of Persons Killed or Injured

   a. In any incident involving a deceased or seriously injured person, positive identification of the victim must be obtained and the next of kin must be notified, prior to releasing the identity of the victim to the news media.
   b. If the next of kin is unknown or has not been located after a reasonable length of time, identity of the victim may be released.

6. Access of News Media to Crime Scene or Area of Serious Incident

   a. In the event of major crime, incident or disaster, police lines will be established for crowd control and/or to preserve evidence. Depending upon the tactical situation or the likelihood of jeopardizing departmental operations relating to investigation and collection of evidence, members of the news media may be permitted access to the perimeters of these areas when properly identified through credentials as members of the news media.
   b. News media representatives and their equipment shall not be permitted inside police lines of a crime scene or area of serious incident, unless doing so does not jeopardize the collection and preservation of evidence or other departmental operations, and does not present a danger to the personal safety of the media representatives, police officers or other persons.
   c. At fire incidents, access of the news media to the scene shall be coordinated with the ranking fire official.
   d. Whenever possible during a major crime, serious incident or disaster, a secure area should be established for the news media personnel to receive and disseminate information.
   e. After a crime scene has been processed or personal have finished carrying out their responsibilities at the scene of a major incident or disaster, only the owner, legal occupant or their agents may grant permission to news persons to enter private dwellings or the surrounding premises to gather news.

7. Access of News Media to Police Reports

   a. Access of news media to police reports will only go through the Deputy

Chief's office.

8. Release of Information Concerning Internal Affairs

   a. All information concerning internal matters of the police department, e.g., training, personnel changes, disciplinary action, police procedures, programs or organization matters, etc., shall be released by the Chief of Police or his designee.

9. Release of Information at Scenes of Incidents

   a. Major criminal and non-criminal incidents. The Deputy Chief or his designee shall release all information
   b. Routine criminal or non-criminal incidents. The Deputy Chief or his designee shall release all information

10. Release of Information at the Police Administration Building

   a. The Deputy Chief shall approve all reports for release to the news media representatives.

D. NON-CRIMINAL INCIDENTS

1. Information concerning written police reports, other than internal affairs or criminal incidents may be released by office personnel after approval of the shift supervisor.

2. Information concerning non-criminal incidents in progress and all other miscellaneous news information may be released by the office personnel with approval of shift supervisor.

E. CRIMINAL INCIDENTS

1. The Investigation Division Sergeant shall release all information concerning major criminal incidents.

2. On-duty detectives may release information concerning routine criminal incidents in the absence of higher authority, in accordance with the regulations stated herein. If difficulties arise, the detective should consult with a commanding officer.