



COLUMBIA HEIGHTS POLICE DEPARTMENT POLICY MANUAL

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The Columbia Heights Police Department is committed to informing the community and the news media of events within the public domain that involve the Department. It shall be the policy of the Columbia Heights Police Department to establish public information guidelines that govern what information may be released, when it may be released, and who may release it.

901:1 Definitions

Public Information

Information that may be of interest to the general public regarding policy, procedures, or events involving the Department, or other newsworthy information that is not legally protected, does not infringe upon the rights of a defendant, or does not compromise the legitimate safety and privacy interests of officers, victims, witnesses, or others.

News Media Representatives

News media representatives are those individuals who are directly employed by agencies of the electronic or print media such as radio, television, and newspapers. Freelance workers in this field are to be regarded as other members of the general public unless otherwise designated by the Department Public Information Officer (PIO).

Public Information Officer (PIO)

The PIO serves as a central source for release of information by the Department, and responds to requests for information by the news media and the community.

901:2 Public Information Officer (PIO)

901:21 Public Information Officer Duties

The Chief or his designee shall be assigned as the primary Public Information officer (PIO) for the Columbia Heights Police Department.

The duties of the PIO include:

- Assist news personnel at the scenes of incidents;
- Be available for on-call responses to the news media;
- Prepare and distribute Department news releases;
- Arrange for, and assist at news conferences;
- Coordinate and authorize the release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects;
- Assist in crisis situations within the Department;
- Coordinate and authorize the release of information concerning confidential Department investigations and operations; and
- Develop procedures for releasing information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort.

901:3 Cooperation of the Media**901:31 Reasonable Access to the PIO**

Authorized news media representatives shall have reasonable access to the PIO, the Chief or designee, and operations of the Department as governed by this policy. When information must be denied to a media representative, the basis for that denial shall be fully and courteously explained.

901:32 Authorized Identification

This Department recognizes authorized identification from all local, national, and international news organizations. Failure of media personnel to present authorized identification may provide grounds for restricting access to requested information, or to incident scenes.

901:33 Release of Public Information

Public information shall be released to the media as promptly as circumstances allow, without partiality, and in as objective a manner as possible.

901:331

Public information may be provided to media representatives by telephone if the identity of the representative is known, or can be authenticated.

901:332

Ranking supervisors at crime or incident scenes may release information of factual nature to the media as governed by this policy, or refer the inquiry to the PIO or police administration. Where the supervisor is unsure of the facts or the propriety of releasing information, he/she shall refer the inquiry to the PIO or police administration.

901:4 Investigative Information**901:41 Referral of Requests for Information to****the PIO**

From the initial stages of a criminal investigation until the completion of trial or disposition without trial, Department personnel shall refer all requests for information to the PIO.

901:42 Information That May Be Released

Information that may be released in connection with an investigation of an event or crime includes:

- The type or nature of an event or crime;
- The location, date, time, injuries sustained, damages, and a general description of how the incident occurred;
- Type and quantity of property taken;
- The identity and approximate address of a victim with the exception of sex crime victims, and in other cases where reprisals or intimidation may be employed;
- Requests for aid in locating evidence, a complainant, or a suspect;
- Number of officers or people involved in an event or investigation, and the length of the investigation.

901:43 Information That Shall Not Be Released

Information that shall not be released in connection with an investigation of an event or crime, unless authorized by the PIO or designee, includes:

- The identity of a suspect prior to arrest, unless such information would aid in apprehending the suspect or serve to warn the public of potential danger;
- The identity of any victim of a sex crime or any related information that, if divulged, could lead to the victim's identity;
- The identity of a victim or witness if such disclosure would prejudice an investigation to any significant degree, or if it would place the victim in personal danger;
- The identity of any juvenile who is a suspect or defendant in a case subject to the jurisdiction of the juvenile court;

- The identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to notification of next of kin;
- The results of any investigative procedure such as lineups, polygraph tests, fingerprint comparisons, ballistics tests, or other procedures (the fact that these tests have been performed may be revealed without further comment);
- Information that if prematurely released may interfere with the investigation or apprehension such as the nature of leads, specifics of a modus operandi, details of the crime known only to the perpetrator and the Department, or information that may cause the suspects to flee or more effectively avoid apprehension;
- Information that may be of evidentiary value in criminal proceedings;
- Specific cause of death unless officially determined by the medical examiner; and
- The home address or telephone number of any employee of the Department.

Following arrest and formal charging of a suspect, but prior to adjudication, the following types of information shall not be released without express permission of the PIO:

- Prior criminal conviction record, character, or reputation of a defendant;
- Existence or contents of any confession, admission, or statement of a defendant, or his/her failure or unwillingness to make a statement;
- Performance or results of any test, or defendant's refusal or failure to submit to tests such as polygraph;
- Identity, statement, or expected testimony of any witness or victim;
- Any opinion about guilt or innocence of defendant, or the merits of the case;
- Any opinion or knowledge of the potential for a plea bargain or other pretrial action.

901:5 Arrest Information

901:51 Arrest, Warrant, Complaint Information That May Be Released

Following arrest, issuance of an arrest warrant, or filing of a complaint, it is permissible to release the following:

- The accused's name, age, residence, occupation, and family status;
- The time and place of arrest, whether pursuit or resistance was encountered, whether weapons were used, charges placed against the suspect, and description of contraband seized;
- The identity of the arresting officer(s) and the duration of the investigation, unless the officer(s) are engaged in undercover operations; and
- The amount of bond, scheduled court dates, and place of the subject's detention.

901:52 Arrest or Formal Charging Information that May Not be Released Prior to Adjudication

901:6 Special Considerations – Criminal Matters

901:61 News Media at Crime Scenes

Department personnel shall extend every reasonable courtesy to news media representatives at crime scenes. This may include closer access of personnel and equipment than available to the general public to a degree that it does not interfere with the Department mission or the movement of traffic.

901:621

The news media shall not be allowed access to any area or scene of an incident or crime where there is a possibility that evidence may be damaged, altered, destroyed, or otherwise prejudiced by its existence being published or portrayed. Once evidence has been processed, removed, and secured by the Department, the media may be allowed to enter by permission of the PIO or investigator on scene:

- On private property, film or videotape recording requires the permission of the owner, or the owner's representative;
- Suspects or accused persons in custody shall not be posed, or arrangements made for photographs, telecasts, or interviews; nor shall Department personnel pose with suspects or accused persons in custody;
- When an individual is charged with a criminal offense and is sought by law enforcement authorities, photographs or mug shots may be released to the media to help locate the individual. No Department photographs, mug shots, videotape, film, or composites of subjects in custody shall otherwise be released to the media unless authorized by the PIO.
- Interfere with law enforcement proceedings, including pending investigations;
- Deprive a person of the right to a fair trial or an impartial adjudication, or give one party to a controversy an undue advantage by exclusive access to such information;
- Constitute an unwarranted invasion of the personal privacy rights of another person;
- Reveal the identity of an individual who has furnished information to the Department under confidential circumstances;
- Disclose investigative techniques and procedures, thereby impairing future effectiveness of the Department; or
- Endanger the life or physical safety of any person.

901:622

At the scene of major crimes, such as hostage and barricade situations, the incident commander in charge shall designate a preliminary press area as early as possible and as close to the scene as safety and operational requirements allow.

901:623

The fact that a suicide or suspected suicide has occurred may be reported to the media, along with factual information describing how it happened. The name, age, address, sex, and occupation of the victim may also be released following notification of next of kin. The fact that a suicide note exists may also be acknowledged without further comment. The content of such a note is personal and confidential, and shall not be released except as provided by law.

901:624

Media representatives shall be denied access to the contents of investigative or incident reports and records where release would:

901:7 Special Considerations – Non-Criminal Matters
901:71 News Media at the Scene

At the scene of significant accidents, man-made or natural disasters, the principles of media cooperation shall be maintained to the degree that they do not interfere with the mission of the police, fire, medical or emergency relief workers.

901:712

Media access to and movement within fire lines shall be controlled by the fire department. In consultation with the fire department in charge, the ranking Department supervisor at the scene shall establish an observation point from which the media may observe and photograph the incident.

901:7121

At the discretion of the supervisor in charge, an inner perimeter may be established for the media from which to record the event.

901:713

News media representatives shall not be prevented from access to any area solely because of the possibility of their injury or death. If this is the only consideration, the media representative shall be advised of the danger, and be allowed to make the decision on his/her own volition.

901:714

Sensitive information relating to internal investigations of Department personnel shall not be released without the express permission of the PIO.

901:715

Daily administrative reports of criminal activity and other significant events shall be forwarded to the Police Chief to be made available to media representatives. Statistical reports of criminal activity shall also be made available to the media.

901:8 Media Accountability

901:81 Notification of Inaccurate Reporting

In the event a Department employee feels news information is inaccurately reported by the media, it shall be the responsibility of the employee to notify the PIO in writing, citing the specific error that was reported.

901:812

The PIO shall review the complaint and make a recommendation whether or not the complaint exceeds the obligations and responsibilities of accurate reporting.

901:813

If it is determined that the complaint is valid, the PIO shall contact the news representative's employer.

901:9 Public Information Training

901:91 In-Service Training

All supervisory personnel will receive in-service training relating to public information and the role of the PIO.

901:10 Coordination with Anoka County CID

901:101

It is the intention of the CHPD to work cooperatively with the Anoka Co Sheriff's office CID in matters that are being jointly investigated. In incidents that are being jointly investigated, the PIO, Chief, and other staff will endeavor to coordinate press and media relations to ensure that the information being released is appropriate and consistent.

BY ORDER OF:
Scott Nadeau, Chief of Police

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