



# WICHITA POLICE DEPARTMENT

## POLICY MANUAL



### POLICY 706

### NEWS MEDIA RELATIONS

#### I. POLICY

It is the policy of the Wichita Police Department to communicate impartially with members of the news media. Within the guidelines set for them in this policy, members of the Wichita Police Department will assist the media with information, as long as the information does not:

1. Compromise the investigation of a police incident; or
2. Detract from the ability to successfully prosecute a case in court; or
3. Violate an individual's legal right to privacy; or
4. Jeopardize the safety of any officer or citizen; or
5. Interfere with Departmental operations.

#### II. PROCEDURES

##### A. News Media Requirements and Privileges

1. Reasonable efforts shall be made to release information equally, without partiality for any media segment [i.e., print, radio, TV, etc.]
2. Daily press reports will be made available to the media Monday through Friday online. Media briefings will be held at the discretion of the Public Information Office in coordination with the Chief of Police or designee. Media briefings will be held in the Spanish language at the discretion of the Public Information Office in coordination with the Chief of Police or designee.
3. The Public Information Office staff are responsible for responding to initial inquiries by the media, but may refer inquiries to other appropriate staff and may hold a media briefing. The Public Information Office staff will make efforts to provide the information in Spanish for any Spanish media present.
4. Department members must maintain a neutral image. Therefore, the City and the Department prohibits members of the Department from issuing statements regarding political issues, items of consideration before the City Council, or policy decisions. All requests for information involving policy matters, or matters proposed before the City Council, shall be approved by the Chief of Police.
5. Department members will not comment to the media about ongoing criminal investigations or cases that have been charged in court, without the approval of the appropriate Bureau Commander.

6. Any Department member who grants a media interview about subjects, incidents or issues of a controversial, critical or sensitive nature that draws or has the potential to draw significant media attention to the Department will notify their respective Watch Commander or Bureau Commander in advance who then will notify the Public Information Unit.
7. News releases are released by the Public Information Unit and describe routine happenings or information detailing who, what, when, or where of an event or incident. They also focus on special events or incidents that pertain to the department.
8. Members of the media will not be allowed to accompany and/or ride along with police personnel unless approved by the Chief of Police or Duty Chief.
9. Members of the media may not resist, obstruct or oppose an officer in the lawful execution of his/her duty. However, the mere presence of a member of the media, the taking of pictures, or the asking of questions does not constitute unlawful interference.
10. Members of the media will be allowed to conduct interviews with Department members; however, consideration should be given to the location of an interview due to any sensitive information that may be seen or heard. If granted access to any working area or squad room for purpose of an interview, members of the media will be escorted to and from the location where the interview is to be conducted.

**B. Major Incidents**

1. Major incidents are defined in WPD policy 104.
2. The ranking officer at the scene of a police incident shall provide timely briefings to members of the media and if the availability exists the briefings will also be done in Spanish.
3. This responsibility may be delegated to a knowledgeable member of the ranking officer's staff.
4. In the case of a major incident, media representatives will be allowed access to an area near the Departmental Command Post. The Commanding Officer will be aware of photographers' needs in regards to proximity to the incident.
5. Updated information shall be released periodically on major incidents to members of the media until police presence is no longer required at the scene. After the initial scene investigation is completed, the Public Information Unit will issue subsequent media releases, as needed.

6. When an operation involves multiple agencies, the agency with primary jurisdiction will make determinations regarding appropriate media releases.
7. In a major police incident the Public Information Unit will be notified of the major event by the appropriate Bureau Commander or the Duty Chief. A decision will be made at that point whether a response to the scene is necessary. In events where a response is deemed necessary, the media briefings will be given at the discretion of the Public Information Unit in coordination with the Chief of Police or Duty Chief.

**C. Release of Information**

1. Non-investigative contact with the media is allowed and encouraged. Officers may provide information of a general, or crime prevention nature, which is not specific to an ongoing investigation.
2. Investigative Information
  - a. On routine incidents where no Command Post is established, media will be granted the same access as members of the general public. On private property, photography, film or videotape recording requires the permission of the owner or the owners' representative.
  - b. The ranking officer at the scene of an incident shall, as soon as practicable, provide media members with factual information pertaining to the event or crime.
  - c. Information released at the scene should include basic facts and circumstances of the incident, including the location, date and time, injuries sustained a general description of the property taken or damaged and a general description of how the incident occurred. A generic description of the evidence seized can be released (caliber of weapons, amounts, and value of drugs will NOT be released).
  - d. Additional information that may be appropriate for release at the scene includes the age and gender of the victims and description of any suspects or witnesses that the investigating officers may be trying to locate.
  - e. When providing a suspect(s) description to the media, an effort should be made to include as much information (personal descriptors) as possible. If the only known descriptors are race and sex, the information should only be released if there is a significant public safety concern.
  - f. The identity of a suspect will not be released prior to arrest unless such information would aid in apprehending the suspect or serve to warn the public of potential danger.
  - g. If the ranking officer giving the media release at the scene is unsure of the facts or the propriety of releasing the information, he/she shall refer the inquiry to the Bureau Commander, or his/her designee, to which the investigation will be assigned.



- m. The name and/or address of a suspect 13 years of age or younger at the time of the offense shall not be released under any circumstance and will be redacted from the Daily Arrest Report that is provided to the media;
- n. The name and/or address of juvenile suspects' age 14-17 years of age will not be released unless such information would aid in apprehending the suspect or serve to warn the public of potential danger.
- o. All information associated with juveniles 17 years of age and younger, unless the information can be released according to Kansas laws or the Kansas Open Records Act (KORA).

**D. Search Warrants**

- 1. The media shall not be allowed to attend the execution of search warrants.

**E. Information from Police Records Management System**

- 1. Members of the Records Bureau will print Information of any criminal case that is available to media from Laserfiche. Public Information Unit staff will approve the release of the information.
- 2. The investigative case file on any crime will not be released to anyone, other than law enforcement agencies except under court order.
- 3. All releases of information will be consistent with the established Kansas Open Records Act (KORA) and administrative regulations of the City of Wichita.

**F. Photographs and Interviews**

- 1. Pictures may be taken in, or from, any area to which media members have been granted access. However, officers may restrict the use of flash, strobes and other high-intensity lighting when such use might hinder a police operation.
- 2. Officers will not interfere with a photographer taking a picture of a prisoner; however, a subject in the custody of an Officer shall not be deliberately posed for the public or new media.
- 3. Officers will not deny media interviews with crime or disaster victims when the victims have expressed no reluctance to being interviewed. Officers may make exceptions when victims are injured, emotionally out-of-control, or otherwise not capable of making sound decisions.
- 4. Officers shall not order witnesses or victims to refrain from speaking to the media but may suggest such a course of action if such statements would be detrimental to an investigation.
- 5. Requests to photograph or record Department events, facilities, or equipment in

non-public areas or for any type of promotional purpose will be referred to the appropriate Deputy Chief.

**G. Internal Matters**

1. The following information may be released to the media by the Chief of Police or the Duty Chief, or their designee:
  - a. Dates of employment of members of the Department
  - b. Tenure with the Department and current/previous assignments. (Unless assigned to the Undercover Section)
  - c. Pertinent biographical information on employees killed or seriously wounded in the line of duty.
2. Information pertaining to Professional Standards investigations will not be released, including the names of complainants, witnesses, accused officers, or the specifics of any disciplinary actions.
3. In the interest of public awareness, the Chief of Police may reveal the findings of an internal investigation upon its completion.
4. Personnel records and performance ratings of Department members shall not be released.