

	Operational General Order	18.01 Public Information	PAGE 1 OF 4
	SUBJECT		EFFECTIVE DATE
	Virginia Beach Police Department General Order Chapter 18 – Media and Public Affairs		06/21/2018
	DISTRIBUTION		ORIGINATOR/REVIEW
	ALL	CALEA: 54.1.1, 54.1.2, 54.1.3	Chief's Staff
BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHIEF OF POLICE:			<i>James A. Coonan</i>

Purpose

To establish the flow of information between the department, the news media, and the general public, while protecting cases from prejudicial publicity.

Policy

The Virginia Beach Police Department is committed to and recognizes the right of the public and the news media to be fully and accurately informed on all matters concerning public safety. It is the policy of the department to release information in accordance with the Code of Virginia and to continually meet with and understand the needs of the media. Members of this department are to cooperate fully with the news media consistent with the guidelines of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), this general order, the Public Information and FOIA Field Guide and City Administrative Directive 2.15.

Public Affairs Office (CALEA 54.1.2)

The Public Affairs Office (PAO) shall coordinate the release of all general information concerning department operations as well as specific statements on controversial issues that might arise concerning the police. Such information shall be conveyed to the media and/or the public in a timely fashion. The Public Affairs Office will strive to facilitate interviews with sources directly involved in the topic of interest. At times, the PAO Office may find it more timely and advantageous to communicate directly to the general public utilizing approved official department social media sites.

Under the direction of the Chief of Police, the Public Affairs officers shall involve the news media in the changes or revisions to the Public Information FOIA Field Guide.

Sworn members of the Virginia Beach Police Department operating within the guidelines of this policy do not need permission to speak to members of the media; however, it is strongly suggested that any media inquiry be first directed to PAO. If officers do speak with media, they are to immediately notify PAO of the substance of any information they have provided. An officer should appropriately answer questions put to him or refer the person to the proper individual or agency for such answers. If information is denied to the media, such denial will be supported by a courteous, logical, and adequate explanation, which can be justified upon further inquiry. No member of this police department will intentionally show partiality to any particular news agency, news outlet, media personality or any particular social media forum.

Desired Role of the Media

Media representatives are expected to seek out the news accurately and impartially. The Virginia Beach Police Department expects the media to recognize the necessary legal restraints upon the police concerning the release of information. Members of the media should not expect to be

18.01 Public Information Office

provided information that would jeopardize the successful conclusion of an ongoing investigation or whose release is prohibited by law or the discretionary release is prohibited by departmental policy. It is further expected that, upon proper demonstration, members of the news media will promptly

correct any information supplied by this police department that has been inaccurately reported. It is desired that news media representatives contact the Public Affairs Office for the purpose of soliciting information upon which news stories might be predicated.

The corporate identification issued to members of the media by the respective agencies shall be recognized by this department.

Social Media Sites

The Virginia Beach Police Department shall establish social media accounts for official department use (ie: Twitter, Facebook, Website, Pinterest, You Tube, and Instagram, along with associated sites). These accounts shall be opened in accordance with the provisions of Administrative Directive 2.15, Social Media Sites. All new social media sites shall be approved by the City's Communication Office and/or the Chief of Police and a list of all official social media sites and the logins shall be provided to the City's Communication Office. The content of all official social media sites shall comply with the City Code of Ethics, Official Website Content Guidelines, Information and Communication Technology Acceptable use, and Information Technology Infrastructure Asset Management. Each official social media account shall display the City's posting standards set forth in Section 6.7 of A.D 2.15.

The Public Affairs Office shall utilize social media sites to highlight positive police-public interaction, as a recruiting tool, to highlight outstanding performance of department members, provide information of up-coming events such as promotion and retirement ceremonies, to connect the Department with the community, and to provide public safety/service/awareness information and education. At times, the Public Affairs Office shall utilize social media sites as a primary means of communicating to the public and the news media during time-sensitive and/or emergent events or when this means of information release is the most conducive for doing so.

Officers are, however, **prohibited** from initiating, or replying to, comments or questions on social media sites about current or past criminal cases, any police operations, or police incidents without first obtaining permission from his or her command and through the Public Affairs Office.

The Community Engagement Unit shall utilize social media sites, such as Nextdoor.com to provide as a means to disseminate or reply to community concerns and crime prevention, safety techniques under supervision of the CEU supervisor and in conjunction with the Public Affairs Office.

Notification of the Public Affairs Office

The Public Affairs Officers or designee shall be notified as soon as possible in each of the following instances:

1. Death or serious injury of police personnel on or off duty;
2. Police vehicle accidents resulting in serious injury or death;
3. Any shooting incident involving police personnel, either on or off duty;
4. Any riot, near riot, or public demonstration;

18.01 Public Information Office

5. Any incident of a serious or unusual nature that involves a city official;
6. Homicide; or
7. Any major incident not mentioned above, that is likely to attract the attention of the media.

Duties of the Public Affairs Office (CALEA 54.1.1 A, B, C, D, E, 54.1.2, 54.1.3 A)

The Public Affairs Officer shall perform the following duties:

1. To ensure media representatives are familiar with the policies of the Department regarding the media, dissemination of information, contact persons, and access to scenes of incidents, the Public Affairs Officer or designee shall ensure that all general orders regarding media relations are explained to reporters assigned to the Department as well as news directors, assignment editors, and editors of media outlets covering the Department;
2. Release information concerning departmental policies originating from the office of the Chief of Police;
3. Assist news personnel in covering routine news stories, and at the scenes of incidents;
4. Prepare and distribute monthly notification schedules to ensure availability to media representatives;
5. Release information on all major incidents (major events, disaster, and catastrophes) including information regarding adult victims and suspects in accordance with the Code of Virginia
6. Operate as the Department representative component in a Joint Information Center (JIC) during man-made or natural disaster events or exercises, as designated within the framework of the Incident Command System (ICS) and/or National Incident Management Systems (NIMS).
7. Assist departmental staff officers in handling any problem which may be encountered in dealing with the media;
8. Arranging for, and assisting at, news conferences;
9. Provide physical facilities and equipment for news conferences conducted by the Department;
10. Identify news agencies and keep current listing of agencies' phone numbers and reporters assigned to the police beat; call or notify all agencies to alert them about major incidents;
11. Assist the Chief in preparing replies to media correspondence and inquiries;
12. Assist in crisis situations within the Department;
13. Serve on the Awards Committee and prepare correspondence concerning awards;
14. Preparing and distributing agency news releases;
15. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about adult victims, and suspects in accordance with the Code of Virginia and;
16. Coordinating and authorizing the timely release of information concerning ongoing agency investigations and operations;
17. Utilize social media to report on significant events to the media and general public, prepare internal and external informational messaging, to include providing information on upcoming department sponsored events, providing information of interest to the public, to include outstanding department member actions, and assist with departmental recruiting.

Response to Inquiries from the Media

PAO will respond to inquiries from the media during normal business hours.

At the scene of an unusual or significant incident, effort should be made to contact a PAO at the scene of an incident to coordinate the release of information. In situations where a PAO cannot respond or coordinate the release of information, the highest-ranking supervisor assigned to the situation shall assume the responsibility for release of information.

18.01 Public Information Office

Information should be released in accordance with the Code of Virginia and the Freedom of Information / Public Information Field Guide.

Crime Scene Management (CALEA 54.1.3 B)

The PAO shall contact the individual or incident commander in charge of any crime scene, major fire, natural disasters or other catastrophic event, special event, or unusual occurrence and determine the most suitable location for a “media briefing area.” Once the “media point” has been established, all releases to the media will be made from this location.

In accordance with the Code of Virginia, the Virginia Beach Police Department will establish no crime scene perimeter larger than necessary. Media shall be advised that crossing an established perimeter can result in charges of obstruction of justice. Media may not obstruct police in the performance of their duties. The department shall not attempt to exercise control over media reporters or photographers who are behind police perimeters. Officers may not interfere with newsmen’s activities as long as their actions remain within the confines of the law.

Multi Agency / Jurisdictional Releases (CALEA 54.1.1 F)

Incidents involving agencies within the City of Virginia Beach or agencies from other cities that require media releases or responses to media inquiries shall be handled by the agency having primary responsibility for investigating, resolving and prosecuting the incident. In cases where the Virginia Beach Police Department Public Affairs Office is not the primary point of contact for the incident, the Public Affairs Officer will assist the primary agency with information and support as necessary. Media inquiries made to the Virginia Beach Police Department on such cases will be referred to the appropriate contact for the primary agency.

Records Retention

All new releases and information releases shall be retained by the Public Affairs Office for a period of five years and then properly destroyed.