

ERIE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

11.06 MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY

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POLICY STATEMENT

The Erie County Sheriff's Office is a contemporary public law enforcement agency that strives to inform the residents of and visitors to Erie County of its activities. Informing the public of this agency's activities is beneficial both to the agency and to those that we serve. The most efficient method of informing the public of this agency's activities is through the news media.

It is the policy of this agency to maintain an open atmosphere of communication with all media outlets because such a policy is mutually beneficial to both this agency and the media organizations with which we interact. Information will be released to the news media in an impartial, accurate, and timely fashion. All employees of this agency, within the limits set by this policy, are directed to abide by this philosophy of cooperation.

No employee of this agency shall release any information that would jeopardize an active investigation, prejudice an accused person's right to a fair trial, or violate any state or federal statute regarding the release of such information. The release of such information tends to create prejudices without serving a significant law enforcement public interest function.

RESPONSIBILITY TO RELEASE INFORMATION

It is the ultimate responsibility of the Erie County Sheriff to release information to the public regarding this agency's activities. The Sheriff may delegate this responsibility to the following individuals:

1. Public Information Officer (PIO) – this employee would be the primary contact for the news media.
2. Supervisors – Patrol Division shift supervisors, Detective Bureau supervisors, or Corrections Division shift supervisors may be authorized to release information to the news media in the absence of the Sheriff or the PIO.
3. Dispatchers and Administrative Assistants may have frequent daily contact with the media. Due to the nature of this contact, dispatchers should be prepared to disseminate information as instructed by supervisory personnel.

FUNCTION OF PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

An employee designated as a Public Information Officer for a given event will act to support all members of this agency in matters involving the news media. To accomplish this task, the PIO will be available during normal business hours and will be on-call for emergencies and critical incidents at all other times. The shift supervisor, whether in the Patrol, Corrections, or Communications Divisions, will ensure that the PIO is informed of major incidents and all other events that may generate media interest. "Major events" are defined as those incidents that generate intense media interest and/or inquiry shortly after their occurrence, such as death investigations in which foul play is suspected and natural or other disasters involving extensive property damage or loss of life.

GENERAL PROCEDURES

General information will be released daily to the various media outlets within the greater Erie County area. Such information includes the daily activity log of the Patrol Division, copies of certain reports filed by members of the Patrol Division, and inmate admission information as kept on file by the Jail Division.

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This general information will be made available to the members of the media in a timely and cordial fashion by members of this agency.

It is the responsibility of the shift supervisors to ensure that reports that may be released publicly pursuant to this policy are approved and disseminated (electronically or otherwise) for review by media representatives and the public.

If media representatives desire additional information or clarification other than that routinely provided, the media representative will be referred to the Sheriff or the Chief Deputy. In the event that the Sheriff or Chief Deputy are not available, the appropriate agency division shift supervisor will address the media representative's request. If that shift supervisor is concerned that the media representative's request may be contraindicated by this policy, the shift supervisor will contact the Sheriff or Chief Deputy before any information is released.

INFORMATION RELEASE GUIDELINES

The release of information to the media by members of the Erie County Sheriff's Office is subject to the Ohio public records statutes and/or applicable federal statutes. The following information may be released to the media on a routine basis:

1. Basic information concerning a crime or incident being investigated by this agency.
2. Descriptions of suspects involved in criminal activity being investigated by this agency.
3. Basic descriptions of weapons and vehicles used by a suspect.
4. Basic descriptions of stolen items.
5. Basic descriptions of injuries and conditions of victims.
6. Name, age, address, and other basic information about those arrested, and the charges against them.
7. Information contained in arrest affidavits and other applicable crime/incident reports.
8. Jail inmate information, to include; inmate's name, date of birth, address as provided by the inmate, charge or charges filed against the inmate, the court in which the inmate will be arraigned, the agency arresting and incarcerating the inmate, the date and time that the inmate was received into the jail, and the required bon amount to be posted for the inmate's release.

The following information is prohibited from release to the media except, if deemed appropriate, by the Sheriff or Chief Deputy:

1. Names, addresses, or any information that would identify the victim of a sex offense, child abuse, or any other crime where the privacy of the individual is protected by law.
2. Active criminal investigative information, active criminal intelligence information, and surveillance techniques.
3. Information contained in supplemental and/or investigative reports shall not be released until such time as the case is closed or the Sheriff, Chief Deputy, or the lead investigator deems it permissible.
4. Names of informants and information provided by them.
5. Grand jury testimony and proceedings.
6. Active internal affairs investigations as governed by state law.
7. Name(s) of witnesses if the release of such name(s) could jeopardize the witness's safety, unless required by law.
8. The identity of critically injured or deceased persons prior to notification of the next of kin.
9. Home address, telephone numbers, and familial information of law enforcement personnel.

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MEDIA INTERVIEWS

Employees contacted directly for an interview by a media representative will forward the request to the Sheriff or Chief Deputy. If the subject matter for the interview is deemed appropriate, and the employee is voluntarily willing to participate in the interview, the Sheriff or Chief Deputy will generally grant approval for the interview. Employees should **always** consider every interview conducted with members of the media to be **'on the record'** and the employee should expect to be directly quoted during any conversation with any media representative.

NEW RELEASES

News releases may be utilized to disseminate information to the community, through the media, regarding major items of general community interest or concern. News releases will be authored by the Sheriff or Chief Deputy unless other employee(s) are directed to do so by the Sheriff or Chief Deputy.

News releases, upon being approved for release by the Sheriff or Chief Deputy will be disseminated as efficiently as possible to the various media outlets, electronically or by any other means.

NEWS CONFERENCES

News conferences may be held in connection with major events of concern to the community as a whole. News conferences will only be held with the prior consent of the Sheriff. Media representatives will be addressed at a news conference only by the Sheriff and his/her designee. At the request of the Sheriff, any employee so directed will organize the news conference and ensure that all appropriate media outlets are notified of the news conference.

MEDIA OBSERVATIONS

By previous approval of the Sheriff or Chief Deputy, members of the media may be authorized to accompany employees while performing their duties. Members of the media may be given access to any area of the agency, providing that the presence of the media would not jeopardize an investigation or the personal safety of the media representative.

ETHICS STATEMENT

It is the policy of this agency to treat members of the media with professionalism and ethical behavior. It is expected that members of the media will respond in a like fashion and follow ethical guidelines established by their industry. Members of this agency who feel that they have been treated unethically or inappropriately by a media representative should direct their complaints to the Sheriff or Chief Deputy. Members of the media who feel that they have been treated unethically or unfairly by any employee should direct their complaints to the Sheriff or Chief Deputy.

MEDIA CREDENTIALS

This agency acknowledges representatives from recognized media organizations who carry and/or display photographic identification issued by their employer. Any individual who claims to be a media representative but who does not display photographic identification issued by his or her employer upon request, will be considered a member of the general public.

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ALTERNATE METHODS TO DISSEMINATE INFORMATION

While the majority of information dissemination to the public by this agency occurs through various media outlets, nothing in this policy is meant to prohibit dissemination of information to the public through any other alternate methods. Such other methods of dissemination would include community newsletters, government access cable television shows, the agency's web site, public appearances by agency members, and any other appropriate method for information dissemination

DISSEMINATION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AUTOMATED DATA SYSTEMS (LEADS)/NATIONAL CRIME INFORMATION CENTER (NCIC) INFORMATION

The dissemination of information obtained from the LEADS/NCIC systems to the media is strictly prohibited, unless such information has been incorporated into a report that is ultimately approved for release to the general public. No employee will release specific information obtained from the LEADS/NCIC system at any time without the prior approval of the Sheriff or Chief Deputy.