



SAN ANTONIO POLICE DEPARTMENT GENERAL MANUAL



Procedure 307 – Public and Media Information

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.01 INTRODUCTION

This procedure provides members of the Department with direction regarding the official dissemination of information to the public and media.

.02 DISCUSSION

- A. Police activities, by their very nature, generate a great deal of public and media interest. Major police incidents, such as officer-involved shootings, hostage incidents, major crimes, and large-scale operations significantly heighten levels of public exposure and scrutiny.
- B. Police information has an extremely sensitive aspect which must balance two major concerns. These concerns are the constitutional guarantees involving the rights to access by the public and the right of privacy belonging to each individual.
- C. Mandates from The Texas Open Records Act and the Family Code bear upon the dissemination of information in that they stipulate certain information agencies must divulge or protect.

.03 POLICY

It is the policy of the San Antonio Police Department to establish and maintain an open and cooperative environment in which members of the media and public may obtain timely and accurate information on all matters of community interest in a manner which does not jeopardize police operations or the rights of citizens, complainants, witnesses, and persons in custody.

.04 RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. The ranking officer at the scene of an incident has the following responsibilities:
 - 1. Releasing to the media, as soon as practical, any factual information listed under Subsection .05A;
 - 2. Designating a press area;
 - 3. Allowing access to crime scenes as soon as practical;
 - 4. Protecting the interests of owners or agents on whose private property a crime scene exists; and
 - 5. Delegating the responsibility for the release of information under Subsection .05A.
- B. Any officer may release information listed under Subsection .05A on a police incident which does not require the presence of a Supervisory Officer (i.e., major accidents, fires, etc.).
- C. The Police Media Services Detail has the responsibility to coordinate media activities involving the various official functions of the Department at scenes of major police incidents. These responsibilities include the following:



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1. Limiting media personnel to those areas which will not interfere with operational functions and access to the location;
2. Establishing and marking an information dissemination point or press area;
3. Arranging interviews with appropriate personnel if and when feasible; and
4. Preparing a written news release, if necessary.

.05 RELEASE OF INFORMATION

A. Police Incidents Information

1. The following information may be released regarding a police incident:
 - a. Location of the offense/incident;
 - b. Premises involved;
 - c. Time of occurrence;
 - d. A brief summary of the offense/incident;
 - e. Identification and description of a complainant (note exceptions in Section .06);
 - f. General description of a suspect (note exceptions in Section .06);
 - g. General description and/or license number of a suspect's vehicle may be released if it does not compromise the investigation;
 - h. General description of the property involved. Avoid descriptions which detail the evidence and which hinder the investigation; and/or
 - i. Identification of investigating officers, without compromising an undercover operation.
2. The Officer delegated the responsibility of releasing information consults with a Supervisory Officer before releasing information not covered by this procedure.
3. The release of information at major crime scenes or incidents is coordinated with the proper investigative unit to ensure crime scene integrity.

B. Internal Information

1. Information regarding internal investigations is released through the Police Media Services Detail or a representative designated by the Chief of Police.
2. Information regarding Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) citywide statistics is released only through the Police Media Services Detail.
3. Information regarding the interpretation of departmental policy or procedures is released through the Police Media Services Detail or a representative designated by the Chief of Police.



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.06 INFORMATION NOT RELEASED

A. Police Incidents

1. The following information in connection with police incidents is not released:
 - a. The name of a complainant or victim who is deceased or seriously injured, until a surviving relative has been notified;
 - b. The name of a complainant who has been involved in any type of sexual offense;
 - c. The name of a suspect, until the suspect has been booked in a jail facility or formal charges have been filed;
 - d. Identification and description of witnesses;
 - e. The existence or contents of statements, oral admissions, or oral confessions made by a suspect or apprehended person;
 - f. Personal opinions about the suspect and/or information on evidence;
 - g. Statements concerning the testimony or the truthfulness of witnesses; and
 - h. Photographs of any person who is a suspect or arrested person which are taken for purposes of investigatory or criminal history record information in an ongoing investigation.
2. Any officer encountering a citizen or media representative who is not satisfied with the officer's response to a request for non-releasable information should refer the citizen or media representative to the officer's immediate supervisor.

B. Internal Information

1. Requests from the public or media for release of the home address or phone number of any member of the Department are referred to the Police Media Services Detail.
2. Any requests from outside the Department for release of information from departmental administrative or field files are referred to the Accounting and Personnel Office.

.07 MEDIA ACCESS TO POLICE INCIDENTS

- A. Members of the media requesting to ride in a police vehicle to a police incident shall make the request through the Police Media Services Detail, with final approval obtained through the Office of the Chief of Police.
- B. Members of the media must display appropriate press credentials prior to being admitted to press areas or locations of police incidents.
- C. Officers should not restrict the movement of media personnel unless their actions clearly and directly interfere with police operations or investigations. The mere presence of media personnel, the taking of pictures, or the asking of questions does not constitute unlawful interference.
- D. Photographs may be taken in or from any public access or officially designated areas. Officers may restrict the use of flash or bright lighting when their use may hinder police operations.
- C. No member of the media shall have any property seized or threatened with confiscation without due process of law (i.e., cameras, videotapes, film, notes, etc.).