

SUBJECT: Public Information Releases**SECTION:** 102.05**REVISED:** MARCH 1, 2008**PAGE(S):** 3

PURPOSE

To insure proper and timely release of information concerning the fire department and its activities to the news media and other interested parties.

POLICY

- A. All members shall exhibit an attitude of helpfulness and concern toward interested persons making inquiries into fire department or City activities. All members who receive inquiries as to the activities of the fire department or the city shall use discretion and good judgment when answering such inquiries, taking into consideration the necessity for release of such information and the needs of the department and/ or the city.
- B. All members shall consider applicable laws when considering the release of information, ie. HIPPA, Sunshine, etc.
- C. During emergency operations, the Incident Commander (I.C.) or (if the position has been activated) the Public Information Officer (P.I.O.) will answer questions and issue statements concerning the incident to the news media. Other members at the scene who receive questions and inquiries concerning the incident shall direct those interested persons to either the IC or (if activated) the PIO.
- D. On a daily basis, the Fire Chief shall provide the news media (upon request) with pertinent information regarding fire department activities.
- E. Members who receive inquiries which may seem to be controversial or of a sensitive nature, regarding the activities of the fire department or the City shall refer those interested persons to the Fire Chief or Safety Director.
- E. Officers who have had questions directed to them shall endeavor to answer those questions with factual information only. If the correct answer to a question is unknown, the said officer shall endeavor to either obtain the correct answer or direct the interested party to someone who can provide the proper information.
- F. The Fire Chief and the Safety Director shall be apprised (through channels) of controversial inquiries or complaints concerning fire department activities.

- G. No photographs or other obtained images taken while assigned on an incident can be released for public information or use otherwise, without the permission of the Fire Chief, regardless of whose equipment was used to obtain the image (departments or personal).

GUIDELINES

The P.I.O. should be guided by the following:

- Try to avoid making statements until specific information can be obtained. However, preliminary or tentative statements can be made while still in the process of gathering information if needed.
 - Media could be encouraged to obtain photographs and film footage while preliminary information is being gathered. The media should be monitored to ensure their safety and to avoid interference with emergency operations.
 - When making statements to the media, the P.I.O. should use a Media Information Worksheet (see Exhibit A) which will ensure that the release of information will follow a clear and consistent format. The worksheet will include:
 - Time of alarm and time of arrival on scene
 - Number of emergency personnel on scene
 - Type and number of apparatus on scene
 - Situation found upon arrival and actions taken or currently being taken by emergency personnel
 - Special or unusual actions taken by personnel (hazardous situations, rescues, outstanding performances)
 - Specifics about injuries and deaths (age, sex, extent of injuries and hospitals to which transported only)
 - Suspected cause if known (Investigation team should always be consulted)
 - Type of damage and estimated dollar loss
 - Fire Prevention lessons learned, with particular emphasis on the value of smoke detection and automatic sprinkler systems
 - P.I.O. must be dressed appropriately for emergency scene or situation. Turnout gear and helmet is preferred at incident scenes.
 - Allow for personal interviews with key response personnel if appropriate.

- **Do not release names of persons injured or deceased.** This information can be obtained from the Police Department, the hospital or the County Coroner.
- When approved by Command, the P.I.O. may wish to escort the media on a briefing tour of the emergency scene. In this situation, the P.I.O. must ensure that media personnel are wearing appropriate protective clothing and equipment.
- It may be helpful for the P.I.O. to have a pre-arranged briefing with media personnel prior to any public education, community service or special training event.

TERMINOLOGY

The following terminology should be used to ensure consistency when providing information to the media:

- **Fire Cause** - will be listed according to one of the following:
 - **Natural**
 - **Accidental**
 - **Electrical/Chemical/Mechanical**
 - **Suspicious/Incendiary** - In the event arson is suspected or involved, the investigator shall make this determination. Until the Investigation team makes a final determination, the cause will be listed as "**Under Investigation.**"
- **Fire Damage and Estimated Dollar Loss** - the following will be used to define the "range" of fire loss by percentage:
 - **Light** - a fire loss of 1-10% of the value of the vehicle or structure
 - **Moderate** - a fire loss of 11-25% of the value of the vehicle or structure
 - **Heavy** - a fire loss of more than 25% of the value of the vehicle/structure

Damage estimates for large businesses, industrial/ commercial structures and major complexes will not be released until the insurance companies release that information. Damage estimates should differentiate between damage sustained by the structure, the contents and any exposures.