346 NEWS MEDIA ACCESS/RELATIONS

346.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to provide direction to officers and supervisors for controlling media access at scene locations where such access would interfere with law enforcement operations. Additionally it will cover the following areas:

- Public information responsibility
- Controlling media access
- Handling media requests for information
- Extent of information provided
- Requesting City Community Relations Specialist

346.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Columbia Police Department (CPD) to support the appropriate release of public information, recognize the obligation we have to inform citizens of events that affect their lives, while maintaining the safety of all persons involved in an incident and the integrity of all investigations.

346.3 PUBLIC INFORMATION RESPONSIBILITY

The public information function for the CPD is the responsibility of the City Community Relations Department (CRD). Media representatives often respond to the scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergency scenes, and other law enforcement functions. The CPD will support the CRD by providing, when possible, basic preliminary information to media representatives on scene, prior to CRD arrival, and relay pertinent information to qualified (have passed a criminal history background investigation) CRD personnel to assist them in meeting their obligations. It is the responsibility of the CRD Director to ensure that only qualified CRD personnel are provided to receive sensitive, protected law enforcement information.

346.4 CONTROLLING MEDIA ACCESS AT SCENES

As soon as is reasonably safe and practical, authorized members of the media should be provided reasonable access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies and other law enforcement activities. Access by the media is subject to the following conditions:

a. For scenes that will require an extended police presence or are attracting a large media presence, as soon as is practicable, reasonable efforts should be made to provide a safe media staging area that is near the area of interest and will not interfere with emergency or criminal investigation operations.
   1. Once a media staging area is established, media representatives should be informed that any preliminary information from CPD will be provided to media at this location only.
2. The location of the media staging area should be provided to CRD personnel responding to the scene.
3. If basic preliminary information is provided by CPD personnel, media members should be advised that additional information will be delivered by CRD personnel responding to the scene, or through other means as appropriate.
   b. Media representatives shall produce valid press credentials that shall be prominently displayed at all times while in areas otherwise closed to the public.
   c. Media representatives may be prevented from interfering with emergency operations and criminal investigations.
   d. Media representatives ignoring or penetrating restricted areas designated by crime scene tape or other means are subject to arrest.
   e. No member of this department who is under investigation shall be required to submit to media visits or interviews without the consent of the involved member.

TACTICAL OPERATIONS – Tactical operations should be handled in the same manner as a crime scene, subject to any restrictions as determined by the supervisor in charge. Department members shall not jeopardize a tactical operation in order to accommodate the news media. All comments to the media shall be coordinated through a supervisor or the CRD personnel on scene.

346.5 HANDLING MEDIA REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

Any media request for information or access to a law enforcement scene shall be referred to CRD personnel on scene, or if unavailable, to the first available on scene supervisor. Prior to releasing any information to the media, members shall consider the following:

   a. At no time shall any member of this department make any comment or release any official information to the media without prior approval from a supervisor. Generally a Sergeant, Lieutenant, or other ranking official will provide media with basic preliminary information and address efforts to establish a media staging area if applicable.
   b. Generally, only preliminary basic information will be provided by CPD personnel at any scene. Any requests for additional or follow up information will be referred to CRD personnel.
   c. In situations involving multiple law enforcement agencies or other criminal justice agencies, the release of any information should be deferred to CRD personnel to ensure only the proper coordinated release of information is achieved.
   d. Members of this department should not make any comments to the media regarding any law enforcement incident not involving this department without prior approval of the Chief of Police.

346.6 REQUESTING COMMUNITY RELATIONS SPECIALIST RESPONSE

The Watch Commander or ranking CPD officer on scene will decide, based on the circumstances at hand and available CRD criteria, whether to request CRD personnel at the scene. If CRD is not requested to respond, or does not respond to the scene, the watch commander or supervisor in charge will notify appropriate CRD personnel by phone, email, or text message, according to their guidelines for notification, with pertinent information about the incident and will relay any information already provided to the media by members of the CPD.
346.7 INFORMATION SUBJECT TO RELEASE

The CPD Information Center will maintain a daily information log of significant law enforcement activities that shall be made available to media representatives. This log will generally be located in the CPD lobby or other area of access as appropriate.

Identifying information concerning deceased individuals should only be released to the media when the decedent’s identity has been verified, the decedent’s family has been notified and the release is approved by a supervisor.

Any requests for copies of records shall be forwarded to the CPD Records Custodian. No police record shall be released by any member outside of the Columbia Police Department.

Requests for information of investigations that are older than thirty (30) days shall be referred to the CPD Records Custodian to determine the records’ current status. The CPD Records Custodian shall provide any open and responsive records associated.

346.8 STATE RESTRICTED INFORMATION

It shall be the responsibility of any authorized members of CPD, tasked with responding to media requests, to ensure that restricted information is not inappropriately released to the media. Examples of such restricted information may include, but are not limited to:

1. The identities of involved officers when the release hinders a law enforcement purpose or reveals the identity of an undercover peace officer and as otherwise required by law (§ 610.100.3, RSMo).
2. Information that would tend to endanger the safety of any individual or jeopardize the successful completion of any ongoing investigation (§ 610.100.2, RSMo). Information pertaining to pending litigation involving this department (§ 610.021(1), RSMo).
3. Any information that is otherwise privileged or restricted under state or federal law.

346.9 ADVANCE INFORMATION PROHIBITED

To protect the safety and rights of officers and other persons, advance information about planned actions by law enforcement personnel, such as movement of persons in custody or the execution of an arrest or search warrant, should not be disclosed to the news media nor should media representatives be invited to be present at such actions except with the prior approval of the Chief of Police.