



PAWNEE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
SHERIFF DARRIN VARNELL

Policy # MEDIA RELATIONS	Related Policies:
<i>This policy is for internal use only and does not enlarge an employee's civil liability in any way. The policy should not be construed as creating a higher duty of care, in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party civil claims against employees. A violation of this policy, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by The Pawnee County Sheriff's Office for non-judicial administrative action in accordance with the laws governing employee discipline.</i>	
Applicable Oklahoma Statutes:	
CALEA Standard:	
Date Implemented: 08/2022	Review Date: 08/2022

A. POLICY STATEMENT

The Pawnee County Sheriff's Office has established guidelines for the release and dissemination of agency information to the news media. It is the policy of this agency that information be released in a factual and professional manner and in a way as not to jeopardize the integrity of an official investigation or infringe upon the rights of the individual.

B. PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

The Public Information Officer will act as a liaison between the Sheriff's Office and the mass news media to ensure that information regarding Sheriff's office matters is properly disseminated.

Public Information Officer Responsibilities:

1. Assisting members of the news media in covering routine news stories regarding Sheriff's Office matters;
2. Responding to scenes, which are of public concern, in order to gather pertinent information which will be released to news bureaus in a factual and timely manner;
3. Maintaining an "on-call" status in order to respond to police scenes which are of significant interest to the public, and to assist Sheriff and media personnel in gathering pertinent information for public release;
4. Preparing written news releases related to Sheriff's incidents and agency activities that are of public interest, and to distribute those releases to the mass news media;

including use of agency social media sites.

5. Arranging and coordinating department news conferences;
6. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential investigations and operations under the guidance of the Sheriff or Undersheriff
7. Being familiar with all agency activities, functions, operations and programs;
8. Releasing agency information under the authority and direction of the Sheriff

C. PERSONS AUTHORIZED TO RELEASE INFORMATION

The Public Information Officer, Sheriff, Undersheriff, and Chief Deputy are authorized to release agency information to the news media.

1. The Public Information Officer may refer specific media inquiries to the appropriate employee.
2. When assigned to an active scene, Sheriff's Office personnel shall refer all news media inquiries to The Public Information Officer.
3. The records clerk is authorized to release information from department files in accordance with applicable public records laws. When applicable, all records requests will be approved by The Public Information Officer Supervisor. Internal Affairs will be notified prior to the records being provided to the requestor.
4. Deputies, Investigators, Jailers, Dispatchers and other department members shall not release any department information to any news organization or reporters without the written consent of the Sheriff.

D. PERSONS NOT AUTHORIZED TO RELEASE INFORMATION

1. Deputies, Investigators, Jailers, Dispatchers and other department members shall not release or communicate with any news organization or reporters about any departmental information or investigations without the written consent of the Sheriff. Further, unless authorized to do so, deputies, investigators, and employees will not release information regarding the Sheriff's Office on any social media platform.
 - a. Upon written consent, the Public Information Officer is to be notified by the agency member who was given consent.
 - b. Upon Consent, the Public Information Officer will review all media releases or statements before the release.

E. NEWS RELEASES

All news releases shall be approved by The Public Information Officer prior to being released to the media.

F. MEDIA ACCESS TO SECURED POLICE SCENES

1. Official Sheriff's lines are established to: Preserve the integrity of an area which is to be analyzed and processed during a criminal investigation;
 - a. Secure areas which may pose a threat to public safety and/or involve significant resources on the part of emergency services (e.g. major fires, natural disasters, or other catastrophic events).
2. The department extends certain privileges to members of the news media at secured scenes so they may gather sufficient information regarding incidents of public interest.
3. A "Media Staging Area" may be established in order to give media personnel a working view of the secured area, as well as convenient access to the PIO, or designee, without violating the integrity of the scene or hindering Law Enforcement operations.
4. Deputies do not have the legal authority to prevent the public or news media representatives from photographing or videotaping Sheriff's Office operations or crime scenes from outside official lines.
5. The commanding officer of the scene may take precautions to cover objects within the secure area which may not be appropriate for public view.

G. RELEASE OF INFORMATION TO THE NEWS MEDIA

1. Unless prohibited by applicable public records law, the following information may be released :
 - a. The date, time, location and nature of a reported crime;
 - b. The name, sex, age, and address of a person charged with a crime;
 - c. The name, sex, age of the victim of a crime;
 - d. A photograph of an arrested person when cleared by the case investigator or PIO;
 - e. Sheriff's Office personnel may not prevent media representatives from photographing arrestees while in a public area however; arrestees shall not be paraded or posed for the media.
2. Information which may NOT be released unless cleared through a PIO:

- a. The identity of any victim of a sexual battery, domestic violence, child abuse or neglect, stalking, aggravated battery or witness tampering or any information, which if divulged, might lead to the victim's identity, residence or place of employment;
 - b. The identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to family notification;
 - c. Specific causes of death prior to the Medical Examiner's evaluation and the approval of the Sheriff;
 - d. Any information concerning the substance of a statement given to the deputies by the accused (e.g. refusal of statement, confession or admission);
 - e. The result of any examination or test of the accused;
 - f. The identity of a juvenile charged with a misdemeanor who has not been adjudicated as an adult; or a juvenile's criminal history;
 - g. Unauthorized release of information which is of an evidentiary nature regarding a criminal case;
 - h. Contents of a suicide note prior to case closure;
 - i. Personal opinions, such as, opinions regarding the guilt or innocence of the accused or merits of the case;
 - j. Information concerning the identity, testimony, or credibility of a prospective witness;
 - k. Information received from, or actions taken by, other law enforcement agencies without their concurrence for the release;
 - l. The home addresses, telephone numbers, social security numbers and photographs of active or former agency personnel or their family members; nor their family member's places of employment;
 - m. Unauthorized comments concerning prior criminal record, character or reputation of an accused;
 - n. Reports, transcripts or summaries of proceedings from which the media and public were excluded by judicial order.
3. Information concerning the identity of a juvenile offender (name, photographs, and address) may be released if the child is arrested for an offense which, if committed by an adult, would be a felony.

H. RELEASE OF INFORMATION INVOLVING OTHER AGENCIES

- 1. When an investigation involves another law enforcement agency the agency having

primary jurisdiction and responsibility shall coordinate the release of information.

2. Whenever the Sheriff's Office, fire departments, or other agencies have shared responsibility of an incident scene, all departmental PIOs will coordinate their efforts to ensure that information is appropriately released.

I. MEDIA ACCESS TO THE DEPARTMENT

1. Representative of the news media agencies entering the Sheriff's Office will be allowed access to specific areas of need by The Public Information Officer Supervisor or designated employee.
2. Media photography within secured areas is restricted and must be authorized by The Public Information Officer, Sheriff, or Undersheriff.

J. NOTIFICATIONS

1. The Public Information Officer, Sheriff, or Undersheriff shall, in an expeditious manner, be notified whenever:
 - a. Incidents of a sensitive nature which may draw public attention to an agency employee or the Department;
 - b. Incidents likely to attract significant ongoing media attention;
 - c. Incidents involving serious employee injury;
 - d. Incidents involving serious injury to a suspect or citizen due to Law enforcement action.
2. Deputies on the incident scene shall determine when to contact the PIO and verify that he/she has been contacted and shall wait until contact by the PIO, the Sheriff, or Undersheriff.