



WEST VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT

Operational Policy

OF0100: Media and Public Communications

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines to Employees on the Department's general public communication strategy and the role of the Communications Officer.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

- 2.1 For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions will apply:

"Communications Officer" means the Communications officer of the Department and includes the back-up or acting Communications Officer.

"Department" means the West Vancouver Police Department.

"Duty Officer" means the on-call Executive Officer (Inspector rank or above and includes Acting Inspector) outside normal business hours.

"Employee" means any employee of the Board and includes volunteers of the Department.

"Executive Officer" means a Member who has been appointed to the rank of Inspector or above.

"FIPPA" means the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, RSBC 1996, Chapter 165, as amended from time to time.

"IIO" means the Independent Investigations Office as authorized in Part 7.1 of the Police Act of British Columbia.

"Member" means a sworn peace officer employed at the Department.

"Patrol Duty NCO" means the Patrol Duty Sergeant or Acting Sergeant.

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“Ride-Along” means a person accompanying a Member of the Department the course of his/her duties on a Patrol shift.

3.0 POLICY

- 3.1 The Department acknowledges that Police accountability is an essential component of policing and that the media plays an important role in informing the public about what the work and services that this Department does on their behalf.
- 3.2 The Department, through the Communications Officer, will cooperate completely and impartially with the media. Public information will be released to the media in compliance with FIPPA and in accordance with this policy.
- 3.3 Media Relations and public communication will be part of the duties and responsibilities of the Communications Officer and will be timely, transparent, and aim to communicate public safety information, Department initiatives, and maintain public confidence in the work of the Department.
- 3.4 It is the preferred practice of the Department to have all public media appearances and comments conducted by Employees who have completed media relations and communications training.

4.0 PROCEDURES

General

- 4.1 Policy cannot anticipate or address every conceivable event; therefore, it is the intent of this policy to allow for reasonable freedom of action in delivering media releases. This policy should be used in formulating decisions with respect to release of information.
- 4.2 The Department provides for the dissemination of public information to broadcast and print news media in order to:
 - a) encourage and assist the community in preventing crime;
 - b) encourage and foster transparency, accountability and a co-operative relationship between the Department, community, and media;
 - c) apprehend persons who may be lawfully taken into custody;
 - d) communicate policing activities of the Department to the public;
 - e) direct the manner in which Department employees conduct themselves when communicating public information to the media;

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- f) assist news personnel in covering both routine news and on-scene incidents;
- g) provide a consistent and approved process for disseminating public information to the media;
- h) facilitate media access to public information in accordance with FIPPA; and
- i) protect the confidentiality and security of information as necessary during the course of investigations.

Media Access

- 4.3 Members will allow reasonable media access to a crime or emergency scene except when:
- a) dangerous or hazardous conditions exist;
 - b) the presence of the media might interfere with or obstruct emergency service personnel;
 - c) media presence could disturb evidence or a crime scene;
 - d) media presence might pose a danger to victims or others; or
 - e) media access would constitute trespassing, a violation of privacy, a violation of the law or would harm a law enforcement matter.
- 4.4 Where media access must be restricted due to exigent circumstances, Members will attempt to advise the media, briefly, of the reason for the restriction, move all media out of the area without exception, and make every effort to restore media access as soon as practicable.
- 4.5 Members will neither facilitate nor limit the taking of photographs in public places of suspects in custody.
- 4.6 Members will not provide the media with prior notification that a search warrant is to be executed, nor will they permit the media to accompany them during the execution of a search warrant. A media Ride-Along will not be permitted during the execution of a search warrant.
- 4.7 Media Ride-Along requests will be coordinated by the Communications Officer with the approval of the Chief Constable or delegate.

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- 4.8 Members on-scene must balance the need for media access and investigative requirements. Members at the scene of an incident must establish a perimeter of operation in order for police to conduct their investigation without interference from the media or public. When establishing a perimeter of operation, the Member must consider:
- a) the need to collect and preserve evidence;
 - b) causes of potential injury to persons or damage to property that may exist at the scene;
 - c) that the perimeter is realistic given the circumstances of the event;
 - d) informing the public and media of the reasons for establishing the perimeter and attempt to obtain their cooperation; and
 - e) that the public and media remain outside the perimeter.

Authorized Members

- 4.9 Members authorized to make releases to the media include:
- a) the Communications officer or Acting Communications Officer;
 - b) the Patrol Duty NCO, or acting Patrol Duty NCO, Staff Sergeant or Acting Staff Sergeant; and
 - c) Acting Inspectors and Executive Officers;
- 4.10 In the event a member of the media requests information from Employees who are not authorized to speak to the media, the media representative will be directed to an authorized person.
- 4.11 Notwithstanding the above, it is preferable the Communications Officer represent the Department in front of the media, particularly in situations involving serious cases or significant events. In such cases, every effort should be made to utilize the Communications Officer or Acting Communications Officer.

Communications Officer

- 4.12 The Communications Officer is responsible for all routine requests for information from the media. In addition, the Communications Officer may:
- a) provide advice and resources to Employees being interviewed by the media;

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- b) provide advice and assist in the preparation of media releases;
- c) when appropriate, arrange for the release of photographs to the media; and
- d) as needed, request a written report from the Employees releasing the information to the media.

4.13 In addition, the Communications Officer is responsible for:

- a) forming and maintaining a close working relationship and liaison between the various elements of the media and the Department;
- b) screening and releasing of official Department information to the media;
- c) scheduling and conducting news conferences as required, including necessary arrangements for facilities, preparation of printed matter for the media; scheduling of necessary Employees; and referring the media to the appropriate officers as a source of information, as required; and
- d) assisting in the development of training material for Employees of the Department and to ensure their understanding of the Department's media policy and the necessity of continued cooperation with the media.

Patrol Duty NCO

4.14 When contacted by a Member at the scene of a major incident and informed of the details of the event, the Patrol Duty NCO, in the absence of the Communications Officer may release or authorize the release of information in accordance with this policy.

On Scene Members

4.15 Members at the scene, other than those authorized, will not supply the media with information concerning incidents or crimes.

IIO

4.16 Where the IIO asserts jurisdiction over an investigation the Communications Officer may advise the media that an incident has occurred and that the IIO has been notified. The Department will refrain from providing media statements regarding IIO investigations.

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Administrative Procedures

- 4.17 All media releases will be placed on the Department's website and intranet. This will be the responsibility of the Communications Officer or the person responsible for preparing the media release.
- 4.18 Nothing in this policy shall be deemed to contradict or supersede the relevant provisions of FIPPA or any other statutory limitation.
- 4.19 Media requests for direct interviews with Department Employees must be approved by the Chief Constable, through the Communications Officer.

Suspect Descriptions

- 4.20 Nothing in this policy is intended to prevent the use of specific facts which may assist in an investigation where the suspect has been positively identified as a member of a specific group, and the information is intended to appeal to specific ethnic community for assistance. However, as a general rule, where a description is obtained from a witness indicating a specific visible racial or ethnic group, based on opinion of the witness, that description should be made in broad generic terms.

Publication of Non-Personal Information

- 4.21 Where a request for information, made pursuant to FIPPA, involves non-personal information that may be of interest to the public or would be important for the public to know, the requested information may be published on the Department's website, or otherwise released or publicized, at the same time as it is released to the requester.

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