

**NUMBER: 6.21**

**EFFECTIVE DATE:  
REVISION DATES:**

**Jul 1991  
Aug 2021  
Dec 2021**

**SUBJECT: Media Relations and PIO**

**2.20.02 POLICY**

It is the policy of the Wheat Ridge Police Department to provide accurate and timely information to the community and media. Information is provided in compliance with applicable laws and regulations without jeopardizing the rights of crime victims, witnesses, and suspects, breaching confidential relationships, or compromising the security or successful completion of any investigation.

**2.20.03 PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER (PIO)**

- A. The Department's PIO serves as a central source of information for release by the Department and responds to requests for information by the news media and the community.
- B. Any other member of the department may be designated and/or authorized whenever feasible to disseminate information to the media.
- C. The Public Information Officer will maintain an on-call status during non-business hours. If a PIO is not available, this role is undertaken by the Duty Commander or a designee.

**2.20.05 DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER**

- A. Serves as the liaison between the department and mainstream media.
- B. Facilitates interviews between department personnel and the media.
- C. Gathers information for the media.
- D. Preparation, distribution, archival of media releases and other publications regarding the department.
- E. Respond to incidents to support department personnel and assist news media as requested.
- F. Respond to or refer the day-to-day request(s) for information which may be generated from the media or the public concerning departmental activities.
- G. At incident scene, establishes staging area(s) in collaboration with the on-scene supervisor or Incident Commander and manages communication strategies.
- H. Determine location for press conferences, notify media, brief spokesperson(s), set agenda, and coordinate conference.
- I. Ensures CORA Requests are forwarded to Records.

- J. May support multi-jurisdictional incidents as a PIO in the event of a line of duty death, if requested.
- K. Promotes positive relationships with the community through the release of information.
- L. Manage WRPD Social Media accounts
  - a. The PIO or designee shall administer all approved WRPD social media sites.
  - b. Authors and schedules posts on Facebook, Twitter, NextDoor, Instagram and YouTube, monitor comments and direct messages, updates information, corrects misinformation or rumors, and oversees archiving contract for social media posts according to municipal records retention procedures on applicable social media platforms.
  - c. Monitors posts, comments and direct messages ensuring compliance with the Guidelines approved by the City Attorney and as stated on the City website.
  - d. Department personnel authorized to contribute or oversee the Wheat Ridge Police Department social media accounts shall:
    - i. Conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the Department and adhere to all Department standards of conduct.
    - ii. Not make statements about the guilt or innocence of any suspect or arrestee, or comments concerning pending prosecutions, nor post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate confidential information.
    - iii. Not conduct political activities or private business.
    - iv. Observe and abide by all copyright, trademark, and service mark restrictions in posting materials to electronic media.
  - e. As an investigative tool, social media can be used to seek out evidence or information about missing persons; wanted persons; barricaded suspects; specific crime(s); and photos or videos of a crime posted by a participant or observer.
  - f. Social media is to be used:
    - i. To make time-sensitive notifications, such as road closures, traffic impacts, special events, emergency and severe weather notifications or information about missing or endangered persons. This includes community updates on significant events.
    - ii. To quickly notify the community of public safety risks and provide accurate crime scene updates.
    - iii. To educate the community on crime prevention strategies, share crime maps and data, and solicit tips about unsolved crimes.
    - iv. To recruit for, advertise and publicize employment or volunteer positions.
    - v. As an effective tool for Relationship Based Policing to create and foster positive relationships between the police department, city staff, and the Wheat Ridge community.
  - g. Social media content is subject to public records laws. Relevant records retention schedules apply to social media content. Content shall be managed, stored and be retrievable to comply with all applicable laws and policies through an annual contract with ArchiveSocial.

- h. Social media pages shall indicate that the opinions expressed by visitors do not reflect the opinions of the Wheat Ridge Police Department. All social media pages will include a link to the Guidelines for Usage regarding the posting of comments and content.
- i. Wheat Ridge Police Department social media, including any comments or posts placed thereon by third parties, shall not be used to:
  - i. promote or facilitate criminal activity
  - ii. solicit business
  - iii. divert users to other sites for commercial purposes
  - iv. publish off-topic material
  - v. promote unlawful discrimination
  - vi. publish profane or sexual material
  - vii. publish graphic violent material
  - viii. compromise the investigatory methods and means of the Wheat Ridge Police Department, or for any other purpose determined to be inconsistent with the purposes of Wheat Ridge Police Department social media, as set forth herein.
  - ix. Allow for the harassment or the promotion of a bias-motivated crime per CRS 18-9-121
- j. Social media pages shall state that the posted comments will be monitored for compliance with this policy and the Department may hide comments that violate this policy. Pages should clearly indicate that any content posted or submitted for posting is subject to public disclosure. Comments and content will not be deleted per policy; however, individuals may be blocked if violations are determined to be egregious by Chief of Police with input from PIO.
- k. Each social media platform operated and managed by the Wheat Ridge Police Department is a non-public forum, established and managed for the purposes described above. Wheat Ridge Police Department social media is neither intended nor designed as a place for expressive activity, and public access to use Wheat Ridge Police Department social media for expression is not guaranteed. Wheat Ridge Police Department social media may be potentially accessed by persons of all ages, and shall be managed with this in mind, in addition to the specific purposes these resources are intended to serve.
- l. When using social media, Department personnel should be mindful that their speech becomes part of the worldwide electronic domain indefinitely. Adherence to the Department's Code of Conduct, Law Enforcement Code of Ethics and the City's Anti-Harassment and Workplace Violence Policies is required in the personal use of social media.
- m. Department personnel should expect any information created, transmitted, downloaded, exchanged, or discussed in a public online forum may be accessed by the Department at any time.

2.20.06 NOTIFICATION OF THE PIO

Circumstances when the PIO should be notified include but are not limited to:

- A. Line of Duty Death or Injury
- B. Officer-Involved Shooting
- C. Activation of SWAT within City Limits
- D. Multi-jurisdictional Response

- E. Shots Fired with Public Safety Risk
- F. Suspicious Death
- G. Suicide in Public Buildings, Parks, or Streets
- H. Barricaded Suspect
- I. Hostage Situation
- J. Kidnapping
- K. Armed Robbery
- L. Traffic-related Incident impacting major roadways or resulting in SBI or Death
- M. Weather Impacts to City Roadways or I-70 within City Limits

2.20.07 COOPERATION WITH THE MEDIA

- A. News media representatives shall have reasonable access to the PIO, the Chief of Police or designee, and the operations of the department governed by this policy.
- B. The ranking member at any crime scene or incident may release information of a factual nature to the media as governed by this policy. If a member is unsure of the facts or the propriety of releasing information, they may refer the inquiry to the PIO, commander, or other supervisory personnel.

2.20.08 RELEASE OF INFORMATION

- A. Release of information shall be in accordance with:
  - a. The Criminal Justice Records – CRS 24-72-301 to 309
  - b. The Children's Code Records and Information Act – CRS 19-1-301
  - c. The Colorado Open Records Act – CRS 24-72-201 to 206
  - d. Colorado Rules of Professional Conduct 3.6 and 3.8
- B. Requests from the news media regarding ongoing investigations or operations will be handled by the PIO in conjunction with the respective Division Chief and other agencies or entities involved.
- C. Confidential or investigative information from Professional Standards investigations will be released per the decision of the Chief of Police and based on CRS 24-72-303 sections 4 and 5.
  - a. Information in Member personnel files is not open to routine public inspection.
  - b. Residence address or phone numbers of any member shall not be released to the media, public, or city employees outside of the police department without the expressed, written permission of the member.
  - c. The release of any information to the media concerning the employment history or performance of any member shall be made through the office of the Chief of Police. The only exception to this shall be verification of employment and current assignment, which may be made through the Human Resources department.
  - d. Official photographs of department personnel will be released pending approval of Chief of Police, Division Chief or if unavailable, Duty Commander.

- D. The Wheat Ridge PIO will be instrumental in establishing a positive relationship with the media by their response to initial calls for information. The media should be provided with the following information, if available, at the time of their initial call.
  - a. The location and time of occurrence.
  - b. The nature of the call, i.e., possible homicide, drowning, barricaded gunman.
  - c. If the PIO is not available and the Jefferson County Communication Center authority is notified by the media or media have arrived on scene, the Duty Commander will assume the PIO role.
- E. The Supervisor/Incident Commander and PIO will collaborate to determine the Media Staging area and once on scene the PIO may provide additional input as to location. Media should be notified of PIO being in route to scene.
- F. Specific details of the event should not be released without authorization from the Supervisor/Incident Commander to the PIO.

2.20.09 ON-SCENE SUPERVISOR NEWS RELEASES

- A. In many cases, the PIO will arrive at the scene after the media. Until the PIO has arrived, it shall be the responsibility of the on-scene supervisor or his designee to organize and accommodate news media requests for information or refer to the PIO cell phone for updates and information.
- B. The supervisor shall establish a media staging area for vehicles in collaboration with the PIO.
- C. In those cases where the PIO is not called out or is unavailable, the on-scene supervisor or his designee shall assume the full duties and responsibilities of the PIO or defer the PIO responsibilities to the Patrol Commander, or if after hours, the Duty Commander.

2.20.10 SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING INVESTIGATIONS

- A. It shall be the responsibility of the supervisor at the scene of a criminal event to determine what information can be released without damaging the integrity of the investigation.
- B. The supervisor shall provide timely information pertaining to an on-scene investigation to the PIO.

2.20.11 RELEASE OF INFORMATION PRIOR TO ARREST

A. The following is offered as guidance for release of information to the media **BEFORE** an arrest is made

**BEFORE AN ARREST**

**OKAY TO RELEASE**

A DESCRIPTION OF THE OFFENSE including a brief summary of events.

INJURIES SUSTAINED OR DAMAGE INCURRED by anyone involved in the event. This includes confirmation of any deaths without releasing any identities.

The LOCATION AND TIME of the offense.

The IDENTITY OF THE VICTIM EXCEPT:

Sex crimes, death investigations where the next of kin have not been notified, and cases where the release of identities may subject the victim to danger or extreme embarrassment.

WHETHER OR NOT THERE ARE ANY SUSPECTS (but not identities).

Information about UNIDENTIFIED SUSPECTS, such as PHYSICAL OR VEHICLE DESCRIPTION.

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**DO NOT RELEASE**

The IDENTITY OF SUSPECTS who are interviewed but NOT CHARGED.

IDENTITY OF VICTIMS OR WITNESSES where such information may subject them to DANGER OR EXTREME EMBARRASSMENT.

The IDENTITY OR ADDRESS OF THE VICTIM OF ANY SEX CRIME. (Sex, age, race, and other generic information may be released).

The EXACT ADDRESS OF A SEX OFFENSE, where such information could lead to the identity of the victim.

ANY IDENTIFYING INFORMATION CONCERNING A WEAPON OR OTHER PHYSICAL EVIDENCE.

INVESTIGATIVE KEYS: any information that could be known only to the guilty person.

Information about VALUABLE ITEMS not stolen.

CONJECTURE ABOUT SUSPECTS OR FUGITIVES.

The ACTUAL OR APPROXIMATE AMOUNT OF MONEY TAKEN during a criminal episode.

IDENTIFICATION OF FUGITIVE SUSPECTS ONLY AFTER A WARRANT HAS BEEN ISSUED. This may include the fugitive criminal background when it is necessary to alert the public that a danger exists.

The IDENTITY OF ANY UNDERCOVER OPERATIVE.

The IDENTITY OF VICTIMS IN DEATH INVESTIGATIONS until notification of next of kin has been made and the coroner has approved the release.

### **BEFORE AN ARREST**

#### **OKAY TO RELEASE**

METHOD OF COMPLAINT. (officer observation, citizen, warrant, indictment).

LENGTH OF THE INVESTIGATION and the NAME OF THE OFFICER IN CHARGE of the INVESTIGATION (except in undercover operations).

REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE IN OBTAINING EVIDENCE.

The CASE REPORT NUMBER

#### **DO NOT RELEASE**

REMARKS OR SPECULATION AS TO THE GUILT OR INNOCENCE OF THE DEFENDANT.

MISLEADING OR FALSE INFORMATION used for the purpose of deception.

Comments about the CREDIBILITY OF TESTIMONY.

If the information for the arrest was obtained from an informant.

- A. The following guidelines shall govern the release of information to the media **AFTER** an arrest has been made.

### **AFTER AN ARREST**

#### **OKAY TO RELEASE**

The TIME AND PLACE OF ARREST.

DEFENDANT'S NAME, AGE, PLACE OF RESIDENCE, OCCUPATION, MARITAL STATUS and other generally related details.

The EXACT CHARGE.

#### **DO NOT RELEASE**

PRIOR CRIMINAL RECORD OF THE DEFENDANT: the Records Bureau may release such information to the media in accordance with state and federal statutes.

The NAME OF THE DEFENDANT'S EMPLOYER.

Comments about the CHARACTER OR REPUTATION OF THE DEFENDANT.

Factual information relating directly to the arrest; i.e., RESISTANCE BY THE SUSPECT, PURSUIT, POSSESSION OR USE OF A WEAPON, DESCRIPTION OF CONTRABAND DISCOVERED, IDENTITY OF THE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING THE ARREST.

NAME OF THE ARRESTING OFFICER (except in undercover operations).  
DURATION OF THE INVESTIGATION.

PRE-TRIAL RELEASE OR DETENTION ARRANGEMENTS including bond amount and location of detention.

SCHEDULED COURT APPEARANCES

REFUSAL OF THE ACCUSED TO MAKE A STATEMENT.

Information about the EXISTENCE OR CONTENT OF A CONFESSION, ADMISSION OR STATEMENT BY THE ACCUSED.

The REFUSAL OF THE DEFENDANT TO SUBMIT TO ANY TESTS.

A REINACTMENT OF THE CRIME.

The IDENTITY, CREDIBILITY OR TESTIMONY OF PROSPECTIVE WITNESSES.

RESULTS OR A DESCRIPTION OF ANY LAB EXAMINATION OR PHYSICAL EVIDENCE.

**AFTER AN ARREST**

**OKAY TO RELEASE**

The USE OF SEARCH OR ARREST WARRANTS.

REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE IN OBTAINING EVIDENCE.

The CASE REPORT NUMBER.

**DO NOT RELEASE**

That the DEFENDANT DIRECTED POLICE TO THE LOCATION OF A WEAPON, CONTRABAND OR OTHER PHYSICAL EVIDENCE.

The NAMES OF ANY JUVENILE DEFENDANTS, with the exception of the following:

- 1) traffic code violations.
- 2) fish and game violations.

If the INFORMATION LEADING TO THE ARREST WAS OBTAINED BY AN INFORMANT.

**\*\*INFORMATION DECLARED CONFIDENTIAL BY STATUTE:**

19-1-307 Dependency and Neglect Records and Information

27-81-111 Emergency Commitment



27-65-121 Records under title Care and Treatment of Persons with Mental Illness.

19-1-304 Juvenile Delinquency Records, (b.5) Arrest and Criminal Records-Certain Juveniles-Public Access-information Limited.

**\*\* See "CRIMINAL JUSTICE RECORDS RELEASE RESTRICTIONS"**

#### 2.20.12 PRESS RELEASE FORMAT

- A. For complex incidents and/or those garnering regional or national interest a written news release may be produced for distribution. Written release shall be approved by an appropriate supervisor or a Commander, or the Chief of Police prior to release or posting. The PIO will provide a copy of the release to the Chief of Police prior to distribution or as soon as possible. The PIO will also email copies to the city PIO, city manager and elected officials as soon as practical.

#### 2.20.13 MEDIA NOTIFICATIONS

- A. Timely notifications regarding incidents or risks to public safety will be posted first to Twitter and then Facebook with phone follow up to television and radio media outlets to ensure they received notification.
- B. For complex incidents or arrest updates, crime prevention information, special event promotion and department promotions of personnel press releases will be created, approved by team supervisor or Command level staff, and emailed to media outlets with copy sent to City PIO, Directors and elected officials and posted to City website.
  - a. All Press Releases shall be distributed with the standardized press release format template found on the P Drive/PublicInformationOfficer folder.
- C. Distribution of Press Releases
  - 1. After a press release has been prepared it will be distributed to the media list available on the P Drive/PublicInformationOfficer folder.
- D. The media notification list will be reviewed and updated annually and published on the P Drive/PublicInformationOfficer by a member of the Communications Team.

#### 2.20.14 RELEASE OF INFORMATION – MULTIPLE AGENCIES

- A. When the Wheat Ridge Police Department initiates any activity in another jurisdiction, it shall be the responsibility of the Wheat Ridge Police Department to prepare and release information to the news media. In some cases, this will require prior arrangement with the PIO of the agency having jurisdiction.

- B. In any situation where multiple jurisdictions are present, activities of the media should be coordinated between the PIO and their counterpart representing such agencies. Release of information will be the responsibility of the primary agency.
- C. If another agency initiates any activity within the city, that agency will be responsible for releasing information about its activity to the media.
- D. Once a case has been accepted by the Jefferson County District Attorney's Office, or other prosecuting authority, media requests for information will be referred to them.

#### 2.20.15 NEWS MEDIA CONSIDERATIONS AND ACCESS

- A. Relationships with the media will be maintained in a professional and courteous manner. Members of WRPD will extend every reasonable courtesy to media representatives at a scene.
- B. It is understood that the media can assist the department with informing the public of public safety risks and traffic impacts. They can also be used to assist with locating and identifying suspects, locating lost at-risk adults or children, and locating victims of abduction. Such requests for assistance will come from the PIO or the scene supervisor.
- C. In the case of media inquiries at a scene, the scene supervisor or designee will keep the media advised as the situation warrants, until the arrival of the PIO.
- D. The scene supervisor or designee will be responsible to ensure the appropriate information is conveyed to the PIO and to coordinate the release of appropriate information.
- E. Media representatives should not be excluded from the general vicinity of a scene, provided it does not interfere with operations or investigation.
- F. The media shall not be allowed access to any area where there is a possibility that evidence may be damaged, destroyed or altered.
- G. The media may be allowed access once evidentiary concerns have been addressed (i.e. processing, collection, securing).
- H. The scene supervisor or PIO will direct entry by media representatives into the area. With approval of the scene supervisor, the PIO may request the media to pool their resources and select one reporter and one photojournalist for access to the scene in order to share footage with other media.
- I. The media, including photographers, shall not be allowed access to private property if the owner or agent of that property requests they be excluded.
- J. At the scenes of incidents or during crisis situations, media cooperation will be maintained to the degree that it does not interfere with the mission of the department or other emergency response personnel.