

Media Relations

324.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidelines for the release of official department information to the media. It also addresses coordinating media access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies and other law enforcement activities.

324.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Bozeman Police Department to protect the privacy rights of individuals, while releasing non-confidential information to the media regarding topics of public concern. Information that has the potential to negatively affect investigations will not be released.

324.3 RESPONSIBILITIES

The ultimate authority and responsibility for the release of information to the media shall remain with the Chief of Police. In situations not warranting immediate notice to the Chief of Police and in situations where the Chief of Police has given prior approval, Division Commanders, Shift Supervisors, Police Administrative Assistants and City of Bozeman Communication Managers (CMs) may prepare and release information to the media in accordance with this policy and applicable laws regarding confidentiality.

324.4 PROVIDING ADVANCE INFORMATION

To protect the safety and rights of department members 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 media, nor should media representatives be invited to be present at such actions except with the prior approval of the Chief of Police.

Any exceptions to the above should only be considered for the furtherance of legitimate law enforcement purposes. Prior to approving any exception, the Chief of Police will consider, at a minimum, whether the release of information or the presence of the media would unreasonably endanger any individual or prejudice the rights of any person or is otherwise prohibited by law.

324.5 MEDIA REQUESTS

Any media request for information or access to a law enforcement incident shall be referred to the Police Administrative Coordinator or, if unavailable, the CM or the first available supervisor. Prior to releasing any information to the media, members shall consider the following:

- (a) At no time shall any member of this department release any official information to the media without prior approval from a supervisor or the CM.
- (b) During ongoing incidents, members of this department may provide basic information to the media. Members should limit the information to such things as current threats

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to the public, related limitations to public access, a succinct description of the type of incident, and any requests for cooperation or assistance.

- (c) Members of this department may also provide information to the media regarding routine police activity, current trends, general safety topics, and information related to their area of expertise. Members should seek approval from a supervisor when possible.
- (d) In situations involving multiple agencies or government departments, every reasonable effort should be made to coordinate media releases with the authorized representative of each involved agency prior to the release of any information by this department.
- (e) Under no circumstance should any member of this department make any comment to the media regarding any law enforcement incident not involving this department without prior approval of the Chief of Police. Under these circumstances the member should direct the media to the agency handling the incident.

324.6 ACCESS

Authorized media representatives shall be provided access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies and other law enforcement activities as required by law.

Access by the media is subject to the following conditions:

- (a) Media representatives should be prevented from interfering and may be removed for interfering with emergency operations and criminal investigations.
 - 1. Based upon available resources, reasonable effort should be made to provide a safe staging area for the media that is near the incident and that will not interfere with emergency or criminal investigation operations. All information released to the media should be coordinated through the CM or other designated spokesperson.
- (b) Media interviews with individuals who are in custody should not be permitted without the approval of the Chief of Police and the express written consent of the person in custody.
- (c) No member of this department who is under investigation shall be subjected to media visits or interviews without the consent of the involved member.

324.6.1 CRITICAL OPERATIONS

A critical incident or tactical operation should be handled in the same manner as a crime scene, except the media should not be permitted within the inner perimeter of the incident, subject to any restrictions as determined by the supervisor in charge. Department members shall not jeopardize a critical incident or tactical operation in order to accommodate the media. All comments to the media shall be coordinated through a supervisor or the CM.

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324.7 CONFIDENTIAL OR RESTRICTED INFORMATION

It shall be the responsibility of the CM or a member of the Command Staff to ensure that confidential or restricted information is not inappropriately released to the media. When in doubt, authorized and available legal counsel should be consulted prior to releasing any information.

324.7.1 EMPLOYEE INFORMATION

The identities of officers involved in shootings or other critical incidents may only be released to the media with the approval of the Chief of Police.

Any requests for copies of related reports or additional information not contained in the information log (see the Information Log section in this policy), including the identity of officers involved in shootings or other critical incidents, shall be referred to the Chief of Police.

Such requests will be processed in accordance with public records laws.

324.8 RELEASE OF INFORMATION

In coordination with the CM, the Department may routinely release information to the media without receiving a specific request. This may include media releases regarding critical incidents, information of public concern, updates regarding significant incidents or requests for public assistance in solving crimes or identifying suspects. This information may also be released through the department website or other electronic data sources.

324.8.1 INFORMATION LOG

The Department will maintain a daily information log of the calls for service. Log entries shall only contain information that is deemed public information and not restricted or confidential by this policy or applicable law. The daily information log shall be made digitally available to the public and media representatives by Information Services.

Each employee will complete their calls for service by the end of the employee's shift, unless an exception is granted by the shift commander. Each call for service will generally include:

- (a) The date, time, location, case number, type of crime, extent of injury or loss, and names of individuals involved in crimes occurring within this jurisdiction, unless the release of such information would endanger the safety of any individual or jeopardize the successful completion of any ongoing investigation, or the information is confidential (e.g., juveniles or certain victims).
- (b) The date, time, location, case number, name, age and charges for each person arrested by this department, unless the release of such information would endanger the safety of any individual or jeopardize the successful completion of any ongoing investigation or the information is confidential (e.g., juveniles).
- (c) The time and location of other significant law enforcement activities or requests for service with a brief summary of the incident.