

DALTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

Standard Operating Procedure

S.O.P.: C- 3
Effective: 02-27-2018
Revised: 03-26-2020
Reviewed: 03-22-2022

Fire Chief Signature

DATE

Policy: Media Communications

Scope: All Personnel

Procedure

It is the policy of the City of Dalton Fire Department that personnel are committed to cooperate fully with news media representatives in support of their “constitutional” guarantees of the First Amendment. Personnel will provide factual and timely information on a fair and impartial basis without jeopardizing the rights of victims or compromising investigations. Information will be released in compliance with the Georgia Open Records Act O.C.G.A. 50-18-70.

Media contact concerning an incident

It shall be the responsibility of the incident commander or his/her designee to brief all media that request an interview on the scene of an incident. A media briefing shall be conducted at the incident commander’s/designee’s earliest convenience and should be repeated as often as necessary. When the situation dictates that full attention be placed on the ongoing incident, a staging area for media should be designated.

If the incident is large scale or extended duration, the City of Dalton Public Information Officer may be requested to act as the public information officer for the incident. If he/she is available, the incident commander shall keep him/her updated with important details of the incident.

After returning to service from a structure fire, the incident commander or his/her designee shall complete a media statement. This statement shall be forwarded to the City of Dalton Public Information Officer for distribution to all area media sources. The media statement shall also be forwarded to the administrative assistant. All other questions shall be forwarded to the on-duty officer in charge.

Direct access to the incident scene by media representatives shall be allowed only after the investigation is complete and they shall only be allowed in areas deemed safe while the fire department maintains custody of the scene. Observation points may be established in safe areas for the media while the scene is active and during the investigation.

During large scale events when working under a unified command, press conferences may be called. A representative shall be assigned to speak for the department to give media information concerning fire department activities at the incident.

Media request for information concerning fire department business

Any request for information or an interview concerning activities not related to an incident shall be delegated to the appropriate division. If there is doubt as to who should fulfill this media request, contact shall be made to the Chief or Deputy Chief for guidance.

Information restricted to release by the Fire Chief

Statements of departmental policy, official responses to criticisms, comments critical of another agency, institution, or public official, information concerning confidential agency investigations or operations, or statements pertaining to pending litigation involving the department shall only be addressed by the Fire Chief. This includes information regarding an internal investigation of alleged misconduct by members of the department, disciplinary action taken as a result of any such investigation, or names of department members subject to disciplinary action as a result of an ongoing or completed investigation.

Media request for information concerning City of Dalton business

Any request for information concerning activities not related directly to fire department business shall be directed to the city administrator's office.

Miscellaneous

It is important that the department "speak with one voice" in providing accurate and consistent information. Only authorized personnel shall speak to the media. Any media request directed to unauthorized personnel shall be referred to the incident commander or officer-in-charge.

When speaking to the media, do not respond with "no comment" or speculate on causation. Authorized personnel may release factual information of a general nature to the media, as governed by this or other policies or laws. Media has a responsibility to get the news and report it. It is our responsibility to give them accurate details as we can. This will reduce the chance for misinformation.

Names of victims may not be given until notifications have been completed and information has been officially released by the Fire Chief. The release of this information shall be coordinated with law enforcement and the coroner's office.

No one below the rank of Chief Officer or Division Coordinator shall communicate with the media unless express permission is given by a Chief Officer or Division Coordinator.