

DALTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

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I. Policy

It is the policy of the Dalton Police Department that personnel are committed to cooperate fully with news media representatives in support of their “right-to-know” 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 persons accused of crimes, or compromising sensitive investigations. Information will be released in compliance with the Georgia Open Records Act O.C.G.A. 50-18-70.

II. Public Records

- A. Except for the restrictions cited in this policy, miscellaneous incident, arrest, and other criminal incident information on file of a routine nature are considered to be in the public domain and will be made equally available to all news media representatives.
- B. Special news releases that concern a recent event, arrest, or crime will be available to all news representatives.

III. Procedures

- A. Duties of the Public Relations Specialist.
 - 1. Distribute information to the media and employees within the agency following Dalton Police Department policies and procedures;
 - 2. Be available for on-call response to the media;
 - 3. Inform the media of major public events requiring an extended presence of Departmental personnel;
 - 4. Assist the media with covering routine stories and at the scenes of incidents;
 - 5. Coordinate release of authorized information concerning confidential investigations and operations.

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6. Coordinate and authorize the release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects;
7. Develop positive working relationships with local media representatives by:
 - a. Establishing working guidelines;
 - b. Determining local media deadlines and help media representatives meet their deadlines; and
 - c. Preparing and distributing periodic news releases.
8. Arrange and coordinate press conference when needed.
9. Develop video and photographic records of the Department's activities.
10. Maintain communications with the public and media through electronic sources, such as the internet and social networking sites.

B. Other Personnel

1. It is important that the agency “speak with one voice” in providing accurate and consistent information. Employees should:
 - a. Direct media representatives to the Public Relations Specialist, lead investigating Officer, Incident Commander, or shift Supervisor when asked details regarding a collision, crime, or other incident;
 - b. Assist news personnel as directed by the Public Relations Specialist in covering routine stories, and at collision and incident scenes;
 - c. Not say, “no comment”;
 - d. Not speculate about liability issues or causation; and
 - e. Use secure communications methods for transmitting sensitive information.
2. Ranking Officers at crime or incident scenes may release [or approve the release of](#) factual information of a general nature to the media, as governed by this or other policies (i.e. death notifications, juveniles, [road closures](#), etc.), or if given prior approval by the Public Relations Specialist [or Chief of Police](#).

IV. **Information that shall be Released**

A. Arrestee

1. The accused's name, year of birth, residence, occupation, marital status, and other background information, except social security number.

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2. The exact charge, such as the complaint or warrant information and indictments.
3. The identities of the investigating Officers and arresting Officers and the length of the investigation.
4. The circumstances immediately surrounding the arrest, time, location, resistance or pursuit, if any, possession or use of a weapon by the suspect or Police.
5. Information necessary to obtain public assistance in apprehension of a suspect.

B. Incident Information

1. Time, substance, and location of complaints or requests for assistance.
2. The location, date and time, injuries sustained, damages, and a description of how the incident occurred.
3. Amount and type of property taken.
4. The name, age and address of any adult charged with a crime.
5. Information warning the public of danger or the nature or frequency of crime in the community.

V. Information that shall not be released

- A. Opinions about a defendant's guilt or innocence.
- B. Admissions, confessions, or the contents of a statement attributed to the defendant, or a refusal to make an admission, confession, or statement.
- C. Reference to the results of investigative procedures such as fingerprints, polygraphs, ballistics or laboratory tests, wiretaps, electronic surveillance, or refusal to take requested tests.
- D. Statements concerning the identity, character, or credibility of a prospective witness.
- E. Prior criminal record of arrests without dispositions and the character of a defendant. Any requests for arrests without a disposition shall be referred to the appropriate agency.
- F. Opinions concerning evidence or argument in the case and whether it is anticipated that such evidence is essential.
- G. The identities of victims or intended victims of sex crimes, or child abuse, or related information, which would tend to lead to the victim's identification.

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- H. The identity of any juvenile under the age of seventeen (17) who is a suspect or defendant in any case.
- I. The identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to the notification of next of kin. (Exception will be when notification has been attempted but is not possible within a reasonable amount of time).
- J. Contents of suicide notes.
- K. The specific cause of death until determined by the county coroner or state medical examiner.
- L. Specifics of the crime or any information that could be known only by the guilty party.
- M. Information received from other law enforcement agencies without their concurrence in releasing said information.
- N. Suspect information, except that information deemed necessary to warn the public of the danger of an un-apprehended suspect or to assist in effecting the arrest of the suspect.
- O. Social security numbers and driver's license numbers.
- P. Supplemental reports that are the subject of a pending investigation or prosecution.
- Q. The month and date of birthdays for all subjects listed in the report.
- R. Telephone numbers.
- S. Any other records or information as outlined in the Georgia Open Records Act.

VI. **Information that is Restricted to Release by the Chief of Police or Designee**

- A. 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.
- B. Information regarding an internal investigation of alleged misconduct by members of the Department, or the disciplinary action taken as a result of any such investigation.
- C. The names of Department members subject to disciplinary action as a result of an ongoing or completed investigation.

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VII. **Photographs and Suspect Interviews**

- A. Members of the Department should neither encourage nor discourage the photographing of suspects or defendants when they are in public places. In no event should the accused be photographed in a posed position.
- B. Photographs or “mug shots” of an un-apprehended suspect may be released at the discretion of the Chief of Police or Division Commander.
- C. Personnel shall not allow persons in custody to be interviewed.

VIII. **Access to Crime and Incident Scenes**

- A. Direct access to crime and incident scenes by media representatives shall be allowed only after all known evidence has been processed and the on-site investigation completed.
 - 1. Prior to the processing of crime scenes, the Officer in charge shall restrict news media representatives and photographers outside the perimeter established by the Officer in charge.
 - 2. The Public Relations Specialist may be called to any scene at the discretion of the Officer in charge. The Public Relations Specialist will establish a news media staging area outside the perimeter of the crime scene and will be responsible for obtaining information from the commanding Officer and providing updates to the members of the news media.
- B. After the crime scene has been released by the Officer in charge, access will not be restricted except that permission must be obtained from the owner if the location is on private property.
- C. Media access to fire scenes is controlled by the Fire Officer in charge. The ranking Police Officer at the fire scene shall confer with the fire official and assist in establishing an observation point for the media.
- D. Media access to major incidents, natural disasters, and other catastrophic events is controlled by the Incident Commander.

The Public Relations Specialist will establish a news media staging area outside of the perimeter of the event and will be responsible for obtaining information from the Incident Commander and providing updates to the members of the new media.

IX. **Juveniles**

- A. Arrest reports and other information regarding the identity of persons under the age of seventeen (17) may not be released to the media, public agencies, or other unauthorized persons, except collision reports which include juveniles may be released.

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- B. Information regarding juveniles may be released to the following upon showing of proper identification:
1. The juvenile, parents or guardian, and juvenile's attorney, if ordered by juvenile court.
 2. The district attorney's office.
 3. Law enforcement agency where the juvenile resides.
 4. Juvenile court, probation, or other agencies, as set forth in OCGA 15-11-82-83.

X. **Incidents Involving Multiple Agencies**

When incidents involve more than one agency, the ranking Police Officer shall confer with officials in the other agency(s) to determine who will be responsible for releasing or coordinating the release of information to the news media. This will usually be the agency having primary jurisdiction over the incident.

XI. **Responsibilities for the Release of Information**

- A. The Public Relations Specialist shall be appointed by the Chief of Police.
- B. The Chief of Police shall be notified as soon as possible regarding ongoing criminal investigations that may prompt inquiries from the news media.
- C. Only the Chief of Police, or his / her designee, is authorized to call press conferences.

XII. **Participation in Policy**

All employees are public relations ambassadors of the Department and are encouraged to bring suggestions that would enhance public awareness of Department programs and activities to the attention of the Chief of Police.

This policy supersedes any previous policies issued.

BY ORDER OF

CHIEF OF POLICE

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