

DALTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

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<i>Subject</i> News Media / Public Information		
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I. Policy

It is the policy of the Dalton Police Department that personnel be committed to fully cooperating with news media representatives in support of their “right-to-know” guarantees of the First Amendment and to providing 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.

II. Public Records

- A. The release of information and public records shall be made in compliance with the Georgia Open Records Act, O.C.G.A. 50-18-70.
- B. Except for the restrictions cited in this policy, miscellaneous incident, arrest, and other criminal incident information of a routine nature is considered to be in the public domain and shall be made equally available to all news media representatives.
- C. Special news releases that concern a recent event, arrest, or crime shall be available to all news media representatives.

III. Procedures

- A. Duties of the City of Dalton Communications Director
 - 1. Distribute approved information to the media and to the public in accordance with City of Dalton and Department policies and procedures and the Georgia Open Records Act.
 - 2. Be available for on-call response to the media.
 - 3. Prepare media releases and social media posts for major public events requiring an extended presence of Department personnel.
 - 4. Assist the media at crime and incident scenes and with covering routine stories.

5. Assist with the release of authorized information concerning investigations and operations.
6. Assist the Department with the authorized release of information about victims, witnesses, and suspects.
7. Arrange and coordinate press conferences, when needed.
8. Assist the Department with maintaining 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 all employees communicate accurate and consistent information.
2. Employees shall:
 - a. Direct news media representatives to the Communications Director, lead investigating Officer, Incident Commander, Watch Commander, or any other employee designated by the Chief of Police, when asked details regarding a collision, crime, or other incident.
 - b. Assist news personnel, as approved by the Chief of Police or his / her designee, in covering routine stories and at collision and incident scenes.
 - c. Not reply to a question from news personnel by stating, "No comment."
 - d. Not speculate about liability issues or causation.
 - e. Use secure communications methods for transmitting sensitive information.
3. Supervisors at crime or incident scenes may release factual information of a general nature to the media, as governed by this or other Department policies (i.e. death notifications, juveniles, etc.) or if given prior approval by the Chief of Police or his / her designee.

C. Social Media

1. Employees designated by the Chief of Police are authorized to post approved information on the Department's social media accounts.
2. Those employees are required to receive training on how to effectively and professionally perform this function.

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3. Social media shall be used to inform the community about Department activities and programs, neighborhood safety concerns, roadway hazards, and community events.
4. Social media may also be utilized to request assistance in identifying possible suspects or gathering leads for criminal investigations.
5. All information posted to the Department's social media accounts shall be factual in nature and shall not contain opinion, conjecture, or speculation.
6. Only designated employees may reply to comments or questions posted to the Department's social media accounts and shall do so in a professional manner.

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.
2. The exact charge(s), such as the complaint, warrant information, or indictments.
3. The identities of the investigating and / or arresting Officer(s) and the length of the investigation.
4. The circumstances immediately surrounding the arrest, including the date, time, location, and the occurrence of resistance, pursuit, or possession and / or use of a weapon by the suspect or Officer(s), if applicable.
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, time, injuries sustained, damages, and a description of how the incident occurred.
3. Amount and type of property taken, as approved by the investigating Officer.
4. The name, age, and address of any adult charged with a crime.
5. Information warning the public of danger or the nature and frequency of crime in the community.

C. Other Identity Information

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Identity information for victims, witnesses, suspects, and juveniles shall be released in accordance with the Georgia Open Records Act.

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 the defendant's 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 the refusal of a suspect / defendant 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 / or 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 identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to the notification of next of kin, except when notification has been attempted but is not possible within a reasonable amount of time.
- H. Contents of suicide notes.
- I. The specific cause of death, until determined by the county coroner or state medical examiner.
- J. Specifics of a crime or any information that could be known only by the guilty party.
- K. Information received from other law enforcement agencies without their concurrence in releasing said information.
- L. Social security numbers and driver's license numbers.
- M. Supplemental reports that are the subject of a pending investigation or prosecution.
- N. The month and date of birthdays for all subjects listed in the report.
- O. Telephone numbers.
- P. Any record or information exempt from production publicly under the Georgia Open Records Act.

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

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- A. Statements of Department policy, official responses to criticisms, comments that are critical of another agency, institution, or public official, information concerning confidential Department 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.

VII. **Photographs and Suspect Interviews**

- A. Members of the Department shall neither encourage nor discourage members of the media or any other persons to photograph suspects or defendants when they are in public places. In no event shall 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 a Division Commander.
- C. Employees shall not allow persons in custody to be interviewed by news media representatives.

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

- A. Direct access to crime and incident scenes by news 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 to outside the established perimeter.
 - 2. The Communications Director may be requested to respond to any scene at the discretion of the Officer-in-charge.
 - 3. The Communications Director or designated Officer shall establish a news media staging area outside the perimeter of the crime scene and shall be responsible for obtaining information from the Officer-in-charge and providing updates to the members of the news media.
- B. After the crime scene has been released by the Officer-in-charge, access shall 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 Dalton Fire Department’s Incident Commander. The ranking Officer at the fire scene shall confer with the DFD Incident Commander and assist in establishing an observation point for the media.

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- D. Media access to major incidents, natural disasters, and other catastrophic events is controlled by the Incident Commander.
- E. During major incidents, natural disasters, and other catastrophic events, the Communications Director or designated Officer shall establish a news media staging area outside of the perimeter of the event and shall be responsible for obtaining information from the Incident Commander and providing updates to the members of the news media.

IX. **Juveniles**

Arrest reports, motor vehicle collision reports, and other information regarding the identity of persons under the age of seventeen (17) shall only be released to the media, public agencies, or other authorized persons in accordance with the Georgia Open Records Act.

X. **Incidents Involving Multiple Agencies**

When incidents involve more than one agency, the ranking Officer shall confer with officials from 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 Chief of Police shall be notified, as soon as possible, regarding ongoing criminal investigations that may prompt inquiries from the news media.
- B. Only the Chief of Police or his / her designee are authorized to call press conferences, issue press releases, or post information to the Department's social media accounts.

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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