

WOLFEBORO POLICE DEPARTMENT

SOP 1.7

Date Issued: 12/27/2019

Review: 02/24/2021

[Note: This written directive is for the internal governance of the Wolfeboro Police Department and, as provided by RSA 516:36, is not intended and should not be interpreted to establish a higher standard of care in any civil or criminal action than would otherwise be applicable under existing law.]

By Order of:
Dean J. Rondeau, Chief of Police

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Policy The Wolfeboro Police Department will assist news media personnel and the public by releasing impartial information and will cooperate with the media at the scene of crimes, accidents, and other public safety incidents.

Purpose This directive establishes policy and procedure for interacting with the public and media representatives.

Responsibilities

Public information officer is responsible for serving as the liaison between the Department and the public to promote positive public relations, ensuring that material and information released is accurate, and reflects a positive and professional image while effectively serving the interest of the community, coordinating publicity for special events, and maintaining files of daily news clippings and news-related audio and video tapes.

All supervisors are responsible for adhering to the requirements of this directive, ensuring all employees adhere to the requirements of this directive, and notifying the PIO at least two days in advance of any community events they are sponsoring or participating in such as: community awards, the crime prevention forum, or the graduation of participants from a drug awareness program.

All employees are responsible for adhering to the requirements of this directive.

The Communications Section is responsible for immediately notifying the PIO of all major and newsworthy events.

SOP 1.7
Public Affairs

Action

Public Relations

The PIO will promote positive relations with the public by:

1. Assisting in handling crisis situations involving the Department;
2. Assisting news media personnel in covering stories at the scenes of incidents as they pertain to public safety.
3. Being available for on-call responses to the news media;
4. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses and suspects
5. Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential investigations and operations as directed by the Chief of Police.

The PIO will coordinate all media requests for interviews.

The PIO will coordinate all requests from media representatives who wish to accompany employees on duty.

At least annually the PIO will solicit input from the media as it relates to the public information function.

Access to Scene

Employees will not allow media representatives or the public to enter the scene of any crime, accident, emergency, disaster, or other incident during the initial investigation.

Employees will not allow any person to interfere with the investigation of a crime, accident, or any other incident scene. The mere presence of a person taking pictures or asking questions about the incident does not necessarily constitute unlawful interference. Therefore, employees will not interfere with a citizen's right to make video, audio, or photographic recordings of police activity, as long as such recording does not physically interfere with the performance of an officer's duty. In the event that a media representative acting in his or her professional capacity is arrested, the PIO must be immediately notified.

Department employees will neither encourage nor discourage the photographing of suspects or defendants when they are in public places. Officers will not deliberately pose a person in custody for the media. Officers may discourage photographs if the suspect will be placed in a line-up.

Release of Information

Employees at the scene of a crime, accident, or other public safety incident may respond to specific requests for information that will not compromise or hinder an ongoing investigation. The incident commander may release general information about:

1. The incident: who, what, when, where and why;
2. The victim's age, gender, race (unless the incident is a sex crime, or the victim is a juvenile)
3. The immediate circumstances of an arrest: time, place, and any act of resistance on the part of the arrestee; and
4. The arrestee's name, age, gender, race, place of residence, employment (unless the arrestee is a juvenile).

Employees at the scene of a crime, accident, or other public safety incident may not release general information about:

1. The prior criminal records, character, or reputation of the accused; the existence of any confession, admission of guilt, or statement made by the accused; the results of any examination or test conducted in an ongoing investigation or the refusal by the accused to submit to the same; or the opinion of an employee regarding the guilt or innocence of the accused, the merits of the case, or the quality of evidence gathered;
2. The identity of fatally or critically injured persons before the next of kin has been notified; the identity, testimony, or credibility of any prospective witness, the identity or location of any victims of sex offenses; or any information concerning the identity of individuals under the age of 18;
3. Any information received from other law enforcement agencies without their written authorization to release that information;
4. Any information about Departmental employees, to include: their involvement in an incident, possible disciplinary action taken, contact information, etc.
5. Official photographs;
6. Any information or statements regarding Department policy or procedure; and
7. Any information from the NCIC or SPOTS

SOP 1.7
Public Affairs

Employees who are not willing to respond to media requests for information on scene should refer the matter to a supervisor, or to the PIO to avoid a response of "No Comment."

After leaving the initial scene of an incident, employees will direct all requests for information to the PIO.

Department employees releasing any information to the news media or to the public in accordance with Section will notify the Public Information Officer (PIO) of that information as soon as possible. Notification can occur by telephone or to the PIO email.

Service Sgt. will monitor social networking sites (e.g., Face book, Twitter, and YouTube) for information that pertains to the Department, and its functions. PIO personnel will not edit citizen's comments on social media sites, but PIO personnel will delete comments such as:

1. Any comments promoting or opposing any person campaigning for election or political office, promotion, or advertisement of a business or commercial transaction, obscene, threatening, or harassing language;
2. Any type of personal attack, or offensive comments that targets any ethnic, racial, age, religious group, gender, sexual orientation, or disability; and
3. Any illegal activity or posting that violates a trademark or copyright issue.

Employees will forward all requests to post a message on social media networking pages through the PIO for review, and if approved, the message, photo, and/or video will be posted by Service Sergeant.

The Communications Section will not respond to inquiries by the media except to confirm the location of an ongoing incident or an incident that occurred earlier in the day.

Contacts with Media Representatives

Employees will not grant interviews or answer questions from media representatives regarding any work-related activities or incidents involving the Wolfeboro Police Department without prior approval from the Chief of Police, or the PIO except as provided for on the initial scene of an incident.

Whenever permission for real time actions of an Employee(s) to be recorded by persons and movie organizations in the production of written, video, or audio communication, such inquiries must be approved by, or receive written permission from Chief of Police.

Release of Crime Statistics

SOP 1.7
Public Affairs

Official crime statistics that are certified by the Chief of Police for publication in the Uniform Crime Report may be released upon request by supervisors.

Press Releases

The Chief of Police or his designee will prepare all press releases and statements for distribution to the media.

News releases from the Department will be distributed through the Chief of Police and distributed in a manner that allows all local media equal availability.

The Chief of Police will coordinate the release of information when other public service agencies are involved in a mutual effort.

Press Conferences

The Chief of Police will schedule and prepare all press conferences.

All local media will be notified of a news conference as soon as practicable prior to the session.