

DEPARTMENT OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES



GENERAL ORDER



100.14

Originating From	Issue Date	Revision Date	Attachments
Administration	07/01/1995	N/A	N/A

SUBJECT: Public Information Officer – Media Relations

APPLICABILITY: All Personnel

POLICY:

The Howard County Department of Fire and Rescue Services (DFRS) recognizes the need to keep the citizens of the County informed about issues and activities that involve the Department. The DFRS will actively seek to establish a climate in which the media may obtain information in a way that does not hamper departmental operations. For this reason, the Department will maintain a complete coverage Duty PIO program with the assistance of all field personnel in its effort to educate and inform its customers.

1 GENERAL

1.1 The Duty PIO will respond to the following incidents:

- 1.1.1 On duty related fire death (M)
- 1.1.2 Civilian/Firefighter fire death (M)
- 1.1.3 Civilian/Firefighter fire injury (O)
- 1.1.4 Multiple civilian deaths due to accidents (M)
- 1.1.5 Special Operations. Responses (M)
- 1.1.6 Any working structure fires (M)
- 1.1.7 Second alarm or greater fires (M)
- 1.1.8 Extended fire service incidents (O)
- 1.1.9 Media Inquiries (PIO notification required). (O)
- 1.1.10 High level media interest incidents (O)
- 1.1.11 MVA's involving DFRS apparatus generating media interest (O)
- 1.1.12 If, for any reason, the I.C. (Incident Commander) deems it necessary (M)
- 1.1.13 Incidents involving VIP's or their family members (O)
 - 1.1.13.1 VIP's will be defined as: County/State/Federal Officials, Public figures of any kind, Employees of the DFRS, County employees involved in serious incidents, or any other persons considered to be a VIP in the judgment of the I.C.
- 1.1.14 *((M) indicates mandatory response to the scene; (O) indicates optional response to the scene)*

1.2 The Communications Supervisor will ensure that the Duty PIO is notified immediately of each of the above listed incidents.

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- 1.3 The PIO Coordinator is the primary media spokesperson for the Department of Fire & Rescue.
- 1.4 Statements to the media concerning emergency incidents will generally be handled by the Duty PIO or the PIO Coordinator.
- 1.5 Regular members of the Department are discouraged from normally responding to media requests without authority from the Fire Chief. However, it is understood that there will be times when a regular member may be the only person to deal directly with the media. To maintain some comfortable parameters for the regular members of the Department, information discussed shall be limited to the basic items contained within this policy & procedure. Professionalism and an appropriate presentation are extremely important in this regard.
- 1.6 Members of the Department who experience difficulties with media personnel will report that information to the PIO Coordinator.
- 1.7 The Fire Chief will be notified, the by the I.C. or the Duty PIO, of news worthy situations reflecting directly on the Department of Fire & Rescue Services.
- 1.8 The Fire Chief will be notified, the by the I.C. or the Duty PIO, of incidents involving VIP's or their family members.

2 PERSONNEL & ROTATION

- 2.1 The Duty PIO is a staff level position responsible for the daily handling of news worthy events or incidents and other duties as defined within this Policy and Procedure.
- 2.2 The Duty PIO personnel consist of the following:
 - 2.2.1 Admin 1, Program Coordinator
 - 2.2.2 Admin 2
 - 2.2.3 Life Safety 1
 - 2.2.4 Training 1
 - 2.2.5 EMS 2
 - 2.2.6 Unit 10
- 2.3 Prior to being included in the Duty PIO rotation, a new PIO will be briefed by the PIO Coordinator, review the PIO policy, and review the PIO training tape as soon as possible.

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2.4 A Duty PIO rotation calendar, published by the PIO Coordinator, will be distributed to the following:

- 2.4.1 Bureau of Administration
- 2.4.2 Bureau of Services
- 2.4.3 Bureau of Operations
- 2.4.4 Bureau of Life Safety
- 2.4.5 Central Communications (Dispatch Area)
- 2.4.6 Duty PIO personnel

2.5 The Duty PIO rotation shall be established to cover PIO duties, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

2.5.1 Each of the personnel will serve as Duty PIO for a period of one week, ranging from Friday at 0800 hours through the following Friday at 0800 hours.

2.5.2 It will be the responsibility of the Duty PIO to provide for a fill-in PIO should the occasion arise when he/she cannot meet the required duty period.

2.5.3 It will be the responsibility of the normally scheduled Duty PIO to notify Communications of the following when a fill-in has occurred:

- 2.5.3.1 Name of the fill-in PIO
- 2.5.3.2 Radio designation of the Fill-in PIO
- 2.5.3.3 Times and/or dates of cover with a fill-in PIO

2.5.4 It will be the responsibility of the normally scheduled PIO to update the "Media-Hot-Line" with the information contained in 2.5.3.1 thru 2.5.3.3 and the digital pager number of the fill-in PIO.

2.5.5 Because of the possibility of frequent changes to the Duty PIO rotation, field personnel requiring PIO services should advise Communications to contact the Duty PIO.

2.6 Equipment requirements for the Duty PIO shall include:

- 2.6.1 News Releases
- 2.6.2 Still Camera(s) (35mm & Polaroid)
- 2.6.3 Cell-Phone
- 2.6.4 Portable Radio
- 2.6.5 Digital Pager
- 2.6.6 Voice Pager
- 2.6.7 Duty PIO Log Book

2.7 The Duty PIO shall use his/her judgment as to the appropriate uniform to be worn while on an emergency response. It is recommended, however, that a uniform shirt,

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with the correct accessories attached, be carried in the vehicle of the Duty PIO. The shirt could then be worn for most (above the waist) T.V. shots or interviews.

3 ROLE & FUNCTION OF THE DUTY PIO

3.1 Daily Duties

- 3.1.1 Review significant incidents and RMS for number of incidents in the prior 24 hours.
- 3.1.2 Routine update of the Media-Hot-Line with information obtained from above.
- 3.1.3 Be available for and respond to news worthy events. This should be accomplished in as timely a manner as possible with safety always being the number one concern.
- 3.1.4 Assist the media personnel covering routine stories or at emergency incidents.
- 3.1.5 Interact with the media concerning previous day's activities or current activities.

3.2 Emergency Duties

- 3.2.1 The Duty PIO shall respond to all emergency incidents listed in section 1.1. The level of response (emergency or non-emergency) shall be determined by the nature and location of the incident. It shall be routine, however, to respond non-emergency unless otherwise determined or specified.
- 3.2.2 Upon arrival on the scene, the Duty PIO will report to the I.C. for specific direction. If other services (ie: safety officer, personnel accountability, etc.) are not requested/needed, the Duty PIO will carry out his/her assigned public information duties.
- 3.2.3 In the event of a Level 1 or 2 staff response, Admin 1 will normally assume the PIO duties and the Duty PIO will assist the I.C. as needed.
- 3.2.4 When the Duty PIO is summoned to the scene of an emergency incident, he/she will be responsible for the completion of the News Release.
- 3.2.5 A News Release, for distribution to the media, will be completed by the Duty PIO on an as needed or requested basis. Every effort shall be made to be as fair as possible to all media agencies with the distribution of any information.

3.3 PIO Duty Log

- 3.3.1 For the purpose of gathering statistical data and for research and development of the program, a log of the Duty PIO's activities shall be maintained.
- 3.3.2 The PIO Coordinator will review the Duty Log during his/her own duty rotation.

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- 3.3.3 The Duty Log will include, but is not limited to the following:
 - 3.3.3.1 Responses to emergency incidents
 - 3.3.3.2 Media Inquiries
 - 3.3.3.3 Any other pertinent activities
- 3.3.4 The PIO Coordinator will assist the Duty PIO with various duties whenever possible.

4 MEDIA ACCESS TO FIRE & RESCUE SCENES

- 4.1 Members will extend every possible courtesy to accredited media personnel at a fire and/or rescue scene.
- 4.2 Media personnel may be permitted closer access (providing an opportunity to view the scene) than that which is granted to the general public.
- 4.3 Access arrangements may:
 - 4.3.1 be restricted until the I.C. determines the area is safe.
 - 4.3.2 allow press vehicles and equipment to be located closer than the general public so long as those arrangements do not interfere with the incident operations.
 - 4.3.3 Media personnel will be allowed to photograph, film, and video tape members or victims under any circumstances, and only from a position where a member of the general public would be permitted to view the same.
 - 4.3.4 Media personnel are to be escorted by, and are the responsibility of the Duty PIO.

5 INTERNAL AFFAIRS MATTERS

- 5.1 Internal investigations are personnel matters. All personnel are prohibited by law from releasing information to the media about such matters unless the involved member waives the privilege of confidentiality.
- 5.2 A member who releases information about his/her case to the media will be deemed by the Department to have waived confidentiality.

6 MEDIA ASPECTS OF OPERATIONS WITH OTHER AGENCIES

- 6.1 The Department is sometimes jointly involved with other agencies in news worthy incidents where the Department does not have primary jurisdiction. In those cases, the primary public information function will not be provided by our Duty PIO. Our Duty PIO will assist as necessary or as requested.
- 6.2 Police incidents are under the jurisdiction of the Police Department. Members will

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not allow access to these scenes until authority is granted by the Police I.C.

7 INFORMATION THAT MAY BE RELEASED

7.1 Incident information that may be released includes the following:

- 7.1.1 The nature and type of incident
- 7.1.2 The location, date and time, general injuries sustained, any property damage sustained, and a description of the incident.
- 7.1.3 The name and address (hundred block) of an adult victim.
- 7.1.4 The numbers of personnel involved in the incident.
- 7.1.5 The name of the I.C.
- 7.1.6 Any general, basic, non-specific information not named in sec. 8.0.

8 INFORMATION THAT MAY NOT BE RELEASED

8.1 The home address or telephone number of departmental personnel will not be released except by consent of the individual concerned.

8.2 The contents of any incident report where a juvenile is a victim. Disclosure of such matters is specifically prohibited by law unless a court order directs otherwise.

8.2.1 Basic incident specific information may be released, but nothing that would directly or indirectly identify the juvenile (ie: "Two juveniles were transported to JHU for possible head injuries as a result of a bicycle accident...").

8.3 The contents of any suicide note.

8.4 The release of the name of any person seriously injured or killed in an incident will be handled by the Police Department. No information relating to a specific cause of death will be released. This will be handled by the Police Department when determination has been made by the office of the State Medical Examiner.

8.5 Video, films, and/or still photographs will not be released to the media if it has been acquired within an area that is not public domain.

8.6 The names of any person involved in an incident of criminal nature (ie: victims, assailants, or witnesses) without permission from the Police Department with jurisdiction.

8.7 The cause of any incident without the official approval of the agency having jurisdiction over the incident (State Fire Marshal's Office, Police, MOSH, OSHA,

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F.A.A., etc.).

Approved:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joseph A. Herr".

Joseph A. Herr
Fire Chief