
MEDIA RELATIONS

This order establishes policies regarding media interviews and media access to disaster scenes, crime scenes, and critical incidents, including incidents involving a hostage or barricaded suspect.

I. POLICY

- A. COOPERATION/INTERVIEWS.** It is the policy of the San Francisco Police Department to cooperate with members of the media in their news-gathering activities as long as investigations are not jeopardized, police operations are not interfered with, or officer safety is not endangered. Each member of this Department has the authority to speak with the news media to his/her level of personal knowledge and is encouraged to do so.
- B. INFORMATION THAT MUST BE RELEASED.** The law requires that certain information must be given to the media. That information is listed in Department General Order 3.16, Release of Police Reports, Section II., B.
- C. INFORMATION WHICH MAY BE WITHHELD.** The law permits the Department to withhold certain information under the circumstances described in Department General Order 3.16, Release of Police Reports, Section II., A. In addition, members shall not:
1. Make prejudicial statements about the suspect or arrestee.
 2. Disclose or comment about the suspect's criminal record.
 3. Disclose the names of juvenile suspects or arrestees.
 4. Disclose the names of deceased person (suspects/victims) until confirmation has been received from the Medical Examiners Office that the next of kin has been notified.

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- D. QUESTIONS.** If a member has a question about the propriety of releasing information not covered in these guidelines, the media representative should be referred to the member's supervisor, the inspector assigned the case, or the Public Affairs Office.
- E. RELEASE OF POLICE REPORTS.** See DGO 3.16, Release of Police Reports.
- F. MEDIA ACCESS TO DISASTER SCENES.** While the Department may exclude members of the general public from a disaster area for safety reasons, the media is exempt from this exclusion and must be allowed into the disaster area (see 409.5 P.C.).
- 1. The media, however, may be restricted from specific areas within a disaster scene when police personnel at the scene reasonably determine that unrestricted media presence will interfere with emergency operations. Restrictions on media access may be imposed only for so long and only to the extent necessary to prevent actual interference.**
 - 2. Disaster scenes, such as airplane crash sites, shall not be designated crime scenes unless the commanding officer at the scene determines from facts then available that there is reasonable cause to believe the disaster may have been the result of criminal activity.**

G. HOSTAGE/ BARRICADED SUSPECT SCENES (Also see DGO 8.02, Hostage and Barricaded Suspect Incidents). Recognizing that the media has both a right and an obligation to report the news, the Department will maintain a policy that provides for dissemination of current information to the media on a continuing basis. Authorized news media shall be permitted within the outer perimeter of the scene subject to any restrictions set forth by the field commander. At the scene of a confirmed hostage or barricaded suspect incident, media representatives will be requested to cooperate with the Department by adhering to the following guidelines:

- 1. CONTACT.** Do not contact the hostage-taker, either by telephone or in live interview. Negotiation is extremely delicate and sensitive. Such contact will critically obstruct the hostage negotiators in establishing contact and maintaining a personal relationship with the hostage-taker, which is vital to the negotiating process. Interference of any nature could result in tragedy.
- 2. PROMISES/AGREEMENTS.** If contacted by the hostage-taker, refer him/her to the Operational Command Post. Any promises, agreements or extended conversations with the person should be avoided. Statements or questions which seem innocent may stimulate the person to commit an act of violence.
- 3. LIGHTS/CAMERAS.** Confer with the police command post regarding the use of lights or other equipment. The location of media personnel and equipment may become a critical liability in dealing with a hostage-taker.
- 4. NEGOTIATIONS.** Remember that individuals taking hostages are invariably homicidal and suicidal. Police negotiators have extensive training and experience in dealing with them. Persons without such training and experience could compound the situation beyond the point of successful resolution. A good basic rule to follow is, "Do nothing that could conceivably make the situation worse."

H. CRIME SCENES. At a crime scene, unlike a disaster scene, the media DOES NOT have a constitutional right to enter and may be legally kept out. Crime scenes which are located in areas of public access may be opened for media inspection after any search, preservation and processing of evidence has been completed and the scene has been secured (see DGO 6.01, Crime Scene Log).

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- I. PARKING OF PRESS VEHICLES. Generally, a vehicle being operated by a member of the media who is actually engaged in the gathering of news is exempt from the provisions of the Traffic Code, provided that a press card is properly displayed in the front and rear windows of the vehicle. The period of this exemption is 2 hours or the duration of the event, whichever is greater.**
- 1. ZONES/ACCESS RAMPS. The Traffic Code is clear, however, in describing specific locations where news gathering vehicles may not park:**
 - a. Tow-Away Zones and Exclusive Transit Lanes.**
 - b. Truck Loading Zones. News-gathering vehicles shall not park in Truck Loading Zones (yellow or black curbs) except during a news emergency.**
 - c. Sidewalk Access Ramps. News vehicles shall not park within 3 feet of any access ramp constructed adjacent to a crosswalk for use by the physically handicapped.**
 - 2. FIRE DEPARTMENT ACCESS. News vehicles must be parked with due regard for access of Fire Department vehicles to any property. Nothing in local ordinances supersedes or cancels the provisions of the California Vehicle Code.**
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References

Event Management Manual, SFPD
Penal Code Section 293
Penal Code Sections 11167 & 11167.5
Government Code Section 6254 (f)