
Purpose

It is the purpose of this policy to establish guidelines for release and dissemination of public information to news media agencies and/or their representatives.

Policy

It is the policy of the Bemidji Police Department to cooperate fully and impartially with authorized news media representatives in their efforts to gather factual, public information pertaining to activities of the department, as long as these activities do not unduly interfere with departmental operation, infringe upon individual rights or violate the law.

Scope

This policy governs the release or sharing of information by Bemidji Police Department employees with all members of the media.

Definitions

The following phrases have special meanings as used in this policy:

Public information means;

- A. Information that may be of interest to the general public regarding policy, procedures or events involving the department or other newsworthy information that is not legally protected under Minnesota Statute § 13.82 or 13.825, does not interfere with an ongoing investigation, infringe upon the rights of a defendant or compromise the legitimate safety and privacy interests of officers, victims, witnesses or others.

Media representatives refers:

- A. Those individuals who are directly employed by agencies of the electronic or print media such as radio, television and newspapers. Freelance workers in this field are to be regarded as members of the general public.

Public Information Officer (PIO) refers to:

- A. An officer designated by the chief of police who serves as a central source of information who actively releases critical information and responds to requests for information by the news media and the community during specific events.

Procedure

I. Authorized Bemidji Police Representatives.

Only specific Bemidji Police Personnel may give statements or release information to the media as follows;

- A. The Beltrami County Sheriff's Records Department will be responsible for fulfilling all media requests for data such as incident reports, squad car video or body worn video in accordance with Minnesota data practices laws.

- B. The chief of police, or PIO, will be the main contact for all interview requests.
- C. The chief of police, or PIO designee, will draft all written press releases which will be made equally available to all news media.
- D. The chief of police is the only person authorized to speak to the media regarding the department budget, department goals, allocation of resources and the interpretation of department policy.
- E. Supervisors on scene of an active incident may provide information allowed under MN statute 13.82 and which does not interfere with the active investigation. This information includes:
 - i. Time, date, case number and nature of the call for service.
 - ii. Any resistance, pursuit or weapons used by agency or individuals.
 - iii. The charge if an offender was arrested.
 - 1. **Adults** - Name, age, sex, and town offender resides.
 - 2. **Juveniles** – age and sex
 - iv. Accidents
 - 1. If the occupants were wearing seatbelts.
 - 2. The alcohol concentration of each driver.

II. Release of information to the News Media.

- A. The Bemidji Police Department recognizes that the news media is an essential partner in our mission to provide professional and impartial service to the public. As such, the police department will work diligently to provide the news media untainted information on matters of public interest except when that information is restricted by law.
- B. The Bemidji Police Department will verify identification from all local, national and international news organizations. Failure of media personnel to present authorized identification may provide grounds for restricting access to requested information or to incident scenes.
- C. Public information shall be released to the news media as promptly as circumstances allow, without partiality and in as objective a manner as possible.
- D. Written press statements shall be released only following approval of the department's chief executive or his designee.
- E. Public information may be provided to media representatives by telephone if the identity of the representative is known or can be authenticated.
- F. Photographs and information data sheets provided by the MN Department of Corrections may be released to the media and public.
- G. Information containing the names, pictures, and circumstances of missing and runaway juveniles may be released with parents' consent.
- H. Department personnel may allow media representatives closer access of personnel and equipment than available to the general public to the degree that it does not interfere with the investigation or threaten officer safety in an effort to promote transparency.
- I. The news media shall not be allowed access to any area or scene of an incident or crime where there is a possibility that evidence may be damaged, altered, destroyed or otherwise prejudiced by its existence being published or portrayed.

- J. Suspects or accused persons in custody shall not be posed or arrangements made for photographs, telecasts or interviews. Additionally, departmental personnel shall not pose with suspects or accused persons in custody.
- K. Media will not be restricted from entering a natural disaster area unless the media's presence interferes with an investigation.

III. Release of information to freelance reporters and the general public.

- A. Freelance reports and members of the public may request information regarding police incident response by completing a data request form from the Beltrami County Records Department.
- B. Freelance reporters and the public will not be restricted from entering a natural disaster area unless their presence interferes with an investigation or there is an active threat to their safety.

IV. Release of Bemidji Police Department Employee Information.

- A. The inclusion of employee names in official press releases will only be done upon written consent from the employee.
- B. Media and public requests for officer information will be in accordance with data practices laws.
 - i. Data requests must be made through Bemidji City Hall.
- C. Requests to speak or contact Bemidji Police Department employees should be directed to the employee's work voice mail or work email.

Reference or Revision Date(s):

A. Minnesota Statutes §13.82 and 13.825

REVISION DATE(S):