



**SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPARTMENT**  
**Wyndmoor, Pennsylvania**

**Policy 5-15**

**Policy Title:** Public Information and News Releases

**Date of Issue:** December 1, 2022

**Rescinds:** None

**By Authority of:**

**Chief of Police**

**I. Purpose**

The Springfield Township Police Department is committed to informing the community and the news media of events within the public domain that are handled by or involve the department. To operate effectively, the department must continue to have the support of the public it serves. By providing the news media and the community with information on the department's administrative and operational activities, a relationship of mutual trust, cooperation, and respect can be maintained.

**II. Policy**

It shall be the policy of the Springfield Township Police Department to develop and disseminate media releases when there is a need to inform the public and / or media of a newsworthy event or department activity.

**III. Public Information Activities**

**A. Assisting Media Personnel at Incident Scenes**

1. The department's Public Information Officer (PIO) shall be designated by the Chief of Police.
2. Should an event occur that may draw media attention, the PIO shall be notified to handle media inquiries so investigators will be free to conduct the investigation.

**B. Availability of PIO for News Media**

1. If attempts to contact the PIO are unsuccessful, the Lieutenant may designate an officer to manage the public information function, consistent with the provisions of this policy.

**C. Preparation and Distribution of News Releases**

1. Under normal circumstances, the PIO will prepare news releases concerning newsworthy events and disseminate the information to the media. This includes information from the scene of an incident, from agency files, and from on-going investigations.
2. The news media will occasionally contact the police department during night and weekend hours regarding specific events. When that occurs, the officer receiving the call / contact shall refer the news media to the PIO or the Chief of Police.
3. The PIO will prepare news releases regarding the daily and major occurrences in the jurisdiction of the Springfield Township Police Department. The releases will be electronically distributed to the editors and producers of the local television stations, newspapers, and radio stations. The releases will also be posted to the department's website and social media pages.
4. Under no circumstances will information be withheld, delayed, or selectively released to favor any particular news media agency.
5. Since the information contained in the releases is considered to be public, the news release may be read to any person who requests it.
6. The PIO shall consult with the Lieutenant or the Chief of Police prior to releasing information regarding on-going investigations.
7. Information relating to internal personnel files and investigations shall not be released to the media.
8. When media requests for information are denied by members of the department, the denial shall be on the basis of privacy rights, safety of a defendant, witness or victim, or other relevant factors. Reasons for the denial shall be adequately and courteously explained.

D. News Conferences

The PIO shall organize and coordinate all news conferences for the department with approval from the Chief of Police.

E. Release of Information Authorization.

1. The PIO shall generally be responsible for coordinating news releases for the department.
2. Releases involving incidents at the school district require the approval of the Chief of Police, or in his absence, the Lieutenant.
3. The following information may be released, with the exception of PennDOT-restricted information:

- i. Accidents
  - ii. Felonies – Brief description of what occurred, how it happened, description or name of suspects (unless juvenile).
  - iii. Misdemeanors – Same as felonies.
  - iv. Arrests – Name, address, charge, date, time and location of arrest, including the basic circumstances. The names and addresses of any juveniles shall not be provided.
  - v. Warrants – Do not report if warrants have been issued, except that the PIO or Chief of Police may approve releasing warrant information:
    - a) When it is a dangerous or violent crime that could possibly present a threat.
    - b) When an arrest may ease public concern.
    - c) When there is an unusual situation.
    - d) To alert the public for assistance and for the public's general protection.
    - e) When an arrest clears a series of crimes.
  - vi. Ongoing Investigations – Brief, non-technical explanation, location, date, time, and a statement that the incident is under investigation.
  - vii. Human Interest – Beyond or in the call of duty or unusual events.
4. The following information shall NOT be released.
- i. Unsubstantiated reports that could alert offenders, place people in position of a civil action, or hamper the investigation.
  - ii. Names of suspects.
  - iii. Witness information.
  - iv. Victims of sex offenses, including personal information.
  - v. Value of property stolen in an armed robbery.
  - vi. Identity of any critically injured or deceased person prior to notification of next of kin.
  - vii. Identity of the location of any critically injured assault victim if the assailant is not in custody and the release may imperil the victim.

- viii. Investigative and evidentiary information.
- ix. Personal opinions.
- x. Statements of credibility, character, or reputation.
- xi. Juvenile information that may lead to identification.
- xii. The location of any victim of abuse or domestic violence seeking shelter from further acts of abuse.

F. Media Crises Situation Assistance

- 1. The officer responsible for a critical incident may enlist the assistance of the media where the broadcast and information distribution may benefit the mitigation and / or successful outcome of the situation. This may only be done after consultation with the Lieutenant, or the Chief of Police.
- 2. Any such media assistance should be documented in the incident report and a news release prepared in accordance with this policy.

G. Mutual Agency Incidents

- 1. In situations where multiple agencies are present, supervisory persons representing such agencies shall be consulted by the PIO to plan a coordinated dissemination of information to the media.
- 2. If the incident is outside of the Springfield Township Police Department's jurisdiction, the release of information will be deferred to the PIO of the agency having primary jurisdiction.

H. Confidential Information and Operation Information

- 1. Information concerning confidential investigations and operations shall not be released either prior to or during the course of the investigation or operation, unless otherwise approved by the Chief of Police.

**III. Use of Photos and Video Content**

A. Publishing and / or Release of Photos and Video Content

- 1. The department may publish and release photos and videos of individuals, criminal acts, and objects insofar as the release of such materials promotes public safety and contributes to a duty to inform the public. The release of these photos and videos shall be done responsibly and after consideration of the sources of such materials.

2. The primary purpose of releasing surveillance-type photos / videos is to elicit assistance from the public in identifying individuals or vehicles involved in, or associated with, the commission of a criminal act.
3. When releasing photos of individuals accused of a crime, protection of victims and witnesses, as well as the rights of the accused, shall be considered.
4. The department may release photos and videos that depict:
  - a. Criminal acts, actors, vehicles, and objects relevant to ongoing investigations where it is necessary to inform the public of an incident, or to request assistance from the public regarding the incident. Such photos and videos may be obtained from officer body-worn cameras, police mobile video recording systems, private / business surveillance camera systems, or other reliable recording devices and technology.
  - b. Individuals missing, unaccounted for, or believed to be in danger.
  - c. Individuals wanted regarding a crime, or ongoing investigation.
  - d. Individuals charged with any one of the following offenses:
    - i. Felonies or crimes violent in nature.
    - ii. Offenses which, upon conviction, require sex offender conditions / registration.
    - iii. Offenses which involve bail conditions / restrictions of public interest or in promotion of public safety.
    - iv. Any other offense that is in accordance with promoting public safety.
5. The department shall NOT release images / videos of the following:
  - a. Juveniles charged through the Juvenile Court system.
  - b. Those cases where an unknown person is believed to be a juvenile.
  - c. PennDOT driver's license / identification card images of individuals unless the individual is wanted or missing.
  - d. Witnesses, unless such release may be beneficial to advancing an investigation, and / or identifying criminal actors.
  - e. Victims of a crime.

B. Removal of Published Photos / Videos

1. The department will remove all published materials from the department's website and social media platforms when any of the following occur:
  - a. One year after the post was uploaded.
  - b. When an expungement order is served on the department.
  - c. In any event when misinformation was inadvertently posted.
  - d. At the discretion of the Chief of Police.

C. Requests for Photos / Videos From Outside Sources

Release requests from outside sources for photos / videos controlled by the department may occur as a result of the following:

1. The conditions listed within this policy have been met.
2. It has been deemed in accordance with the department's public safety mission and transparency goals.
3. The conditions within the Pennsylvania Right to Know Act policy have been met.
4. Specifically authorized by the Chief of Police.

**IV. Policy Input**

In order to foster a more effective working relationship between the department and the media, media representatives will be encouraged to participate in the process of developing procedures relating to the public information function.

**V. News Media Access**

A. Major Incident Scenes

1. The PIO, in consultation with the Lieutenant, will coordinate the activities of the media at the scene of a major incident under the control of the department. A media staging area shall be designated.
2. The media will be denied access to certain areas:
  - i. If the owner of private property requests it.
  - ii. If there is a possibility that evidence will be damaged, tampered with or removed from the scene of a crime, or if the investigation will be hampered.

- iii. If the media's presence would disrupt operations, place a citizen or police officer in substantial risk of injury or loss of life, during a tactical police operation.

B. Crime Scenes

1. The PIO, in consultation with the person in control of the crime scene, will coordinate the activities of the media at the scene of a crime or other incidents under the control of the department.
2. The media will be denied access to inside both the inner and outer perimeter if:
  - i. The inner and outer perimeters are on private property and the owner of the property requests it.
  - ii. There is a possibility that evidence will be damaged, tampered with, or removed from the scene of a crime, or if the investigation will be hampered.

