

Media Relations

321.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidelines for media releases and media access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies and other law enforcement activities.

321.2 RESPONSIBILITIES

The ultimate authority and responsibility for the release of information to the media shall remain with the Marshal, however, in situations not warranting immediate notice to the Marshal and in situations where the Marshal has given prior approval, Sergeants, Sergeants and designated Marshal(s) may prepare and release information to the media in accordance with this policy and the applicable law.

321.3 ACCESS

Authorized media representatives shall be provided access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies, and other law enforcement activities as required by law.

Access by the media is subject to the following conditions (Penal Code § 409.5(d)):

- (a) The media representative shall produce valid press credentials that shall be prominently displayed at all times while in areas otherwise closed to the public.
- (b) Media representatives may be prevented from interfering with emergency operations and criminal investigations.
 - 1. Based upon available resources, reasonable effort should be made to provide a safe staging area for the media that is near the incident and that will not interfere with emergency or criminal investigation operations. All information released to the media should be coordinated through the Marshal or other designated spokesperson.
- (c) No member of this department who is under investigation shall be subjected to media visits or interviews without the consent of the involved member (Government Code § 3303(e)).
- (d) Media interviews with individuals who are in custody should not be permitted without the approval of the Marshal and the express consent of the person in custody.

321.3.1 CRITICAL OPERATIONS

A critical incident or tactical operation should be handled in the same manner as a crime scene, except the media should not be permitted within the inner perimeter of the incident, subject to any restrictions as determined by the supervisor in charge. Department members shall not jeopardize a critical incident or tactical operation in order to accommodate the media. All comments to the media shall be coordinated through a supervisor or the Marshal.

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321.4 POLICY

It is the policy of the Shasta County Marshal's Office to protect the privacy rights of individuals, while releasing non-confidential information to the media regarding topics of public concern. Information that has the potential to negatively affect investigations will not be released.

321.5 PROVIDING ADVANCE INFORMATION

To protect the safety and rights of deputies and other persons, advance information about planned actions by law enforcement personnel, such as movement of persons in custody or the execution of an arrest or search warrant, should not be disclosed to the media, nor should media representatives be invited to be present at such actions except with the prior approval of the Marshal.

Any exceptions to the above should only be considered for the furtherance of legitimate law enforcement purposes. Prior to approving any exception, the Marshal will consider, at a minimum, whether the release of information or presence of the media would unreasonably endanger any individual, prejudice the rights of any person, or is otherwise prohibited by law.

321.6 MEDIA REQUESTS

Any media request for information or access to a law enforcement incident shall be referred to the Marshal, or if unavailable, to the first available supervisor. Prior to releasing any information to the media, members shall consider the following:

- (a) At no time shall any member of this department make any comment or release any official information to the media without prior approval from a supervisor or the Marshal.
- (b) In situations involving multiple agencies or government departments, every reasonable effort should be made to coordinate media releases with the authorized representative of each involved agency prior to the release of any information by this department.
- (c) Under no circumstance should any member of this department make any comments to the media regarding any law enforcement incident not involving this department without prior approval of the Marshal. Under these circumstances the member should direct the media to the agency handling the incident.

321.7 CONFIDENTIAL OR RESTRICTED INFORMATION

It shall be the responsibility of the Marshal to ensure that confidential or restricted information is not inappropriately released to the media (see the Records Maintenance and Release and Personnel Records policies). When in doubt, authorized and available legal counsel should be consulted prior to releasing any information.

321.7.1 EMPLOYEE INFORMATION

The identities of deputies involved in shootings or other critical incidents may only be released to the media upon the consent of the involved deputy or upon a formal request filed.

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Any requests for copies of related reports or additional information not contained in the information log (see the Information Log section in this policy), including the identity of deputies involved in shootings or other critical incidents, shall be referred to the Marshal.

Requests should be reviewed and fulfilled by the Custodian of Records, or if unavailable, the Sergeant or the authorized designee. Such requests will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Records Maintenance and Release Policy and public records laws.