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**Section: 1.13      Public Information**

Effective Date:      01/01/2008

Revision Date:      04/25/2007

Approved by: J Ehret, Fire Chief 04/25/2007

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**SCOPE:**

This action will cover the Department's Public Information Officer as well as all employees who are employed and operate at any Fire Department scene or event. Ability to deviate from this Standard Operating Guideline lies with the Fire Chief or his designee.

**PURPOSE:**

To establish a guideline for the Department's flow of information between the department, the media and the general public.

**GENERAL:**

The Department recognizes the need to communicate openly with the general public and the media. In order to do so, the department will strive to provide correct and factual information to the public and news media in a timely and non-partial manner. The Fire Chief or his/her designee shall act as the PIO for the department.

**Responsibilities of the Public Information Officer (PIO)**

1. The PIO is responsible for coordinating the flow of information concerning departmental policies and operations and on specific statements concerning controversial issues that could arise concerning the department.
2. The PIO will act as the main source for media contacts. The Incident Commander may be responsible for the release of news information at the scene of emergencies. At no time will the emergency operation be compromised for the release of news information.
3. In the event of an extremely newsworthy incident, the IC will determine the need for the assignment of a PIO.
4. A PIO should be appointed at the scene of all major incidents to coordinate media information. MAJOR INCIDENTS shall be defined as:
  - Multi-alarm fire incidents involving industrial or commercial occupancies.
  - Fire incidents involving fatalities or serious injuries.
  - Any incident involving multiple fatalities or serious injuries (>5 ALS Patients).
  - Hazardous materials emergencies or any other incident requiring major evacuations.
  - Extended or complicated rescue operation.
  - Any incident involving death or serious injury to Fire Rescue Department personnel.
  - All serious accidents involving fire vehicles that result in injury or fatality to civilians or fire personnel.
  - Serious aircraft or railroad accidents.
5. Upon arrival at the scene of major incident, the PIO shall report to the command post to confer with the IC on the information to be released.
6. If requested by the media and with agreement of affected personnel, the PIO, via chain of command, may coordinate an interview with employees having firsthand knowledge of a particular fire/EMS related activity.
7. The PIO will obtain approval through the Fire Chief prior to release of information on: Internal investigations, Personnel Matters and citizens complaints to fire personnel or media representatives.

**Incident Command (IC)**

1. IC shall be responsible for the management of public information on the fire ground.
2. At multi-agency incidents, the agency having primary jurisdiction will be responsible for the coordination and release of information to the media.

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3. Members of the media will often respond to a scene that normally would not require the presence of the PIO. In such cases, the IC should be prepared to provide a media briefing as soon as their command responsibilities permit.

**Interview Guidelines**

1. Information released to the media should relate only to the facts of the incident.
2. No determination as to the cause of an incident shall be released. Questions relating to cause shall be referred to the appropriate investigative agency (i.e. State Fire Marshal, local law enforcement, etc)
3. Under NO circumstances shall the names of fatalities or injured persons be released unless authorized by the PIO or the appropriate investigative agency.
4. At no time shall SMFD personnel information be provided to the news media. All requests for such information shall be immediately referred to the PIO via the chain of command.
5. When in the opinion of the IC an incident results in what may be a potentially controversial situation, the PIO will be notified immediately.
6. When a representative of the news media requests interviews or information from department personnel at any time other than that described in the above section, the request shall be referred to the PIO via the chain of command.

**Media Relations**

1. At the scene of any event of public interest, representatives of the news media will be permitted to conduct interviews, take photographs, and otherwise perform their assigned tasks provided their activity does not interfere with fire department operations.
2. Photographs and videotape may be taken from any area where the news media representatives have been given access. Areas of access for news media representatives on the scene of an incident will include: (1) Any areas open to the public (2) Any designated area set aside for news media briefings (3) any area to which the news media representatives are provided guided access to by the PIO, IC or his/her designee.
3. News media representatives shall be permitted to interview victims of an incident who have consented to such interviews providing: (1) the victim is not undergoing medical attention, (2) the victim appears able to make sound decisions, is not visibly upset, severely injured or emotionally distraught, (3) investigative personnel have completed their interviews, (4) and if the victim desires not to be interviewed, the news media representatives will be so advised.