

LCS Unit Order 12

LANCASTER STATION

UNIT ORDER # 12

MEDIA AND PRESS RELATIONS

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this unit order is to establish procedures regarding the access of press and media representatives to the station and its personnel.

ORDER:

As media technology becomes more advanced, permitting quicker access to noteworthy incidents, the probability of patrol personnel coming in contact with press representatives increases. When Lancaster Station personnel are contacted by members of the media or press, with a request for information, every effort will be made to accommodate them, as permitted by Department policy, this Order and the law. If additional interpretation of Department policy regarding press relations is required, the Sheriff's Information Bureau (SIB) shall be contacted for assistance.

There are several sections of the Manual of Policy and Procedures (MPP) and Field Operations Directives which outline procedures for the release of information to, and handling contacts with the media. They supersede this unit order, and all station personnel shall be familiar with their content.

Release of Information to the Media and Public

Information related to events, involving Lancaster Station personnel or incidents being investigated/handled by them, shall be released to the media, upon request, in accordance with MPP Sections 3-01/080.15, *Press Relations* and 3-09/090.10, *Release of Information to the General Public and the Media* and Field

Operations Directives 97-4, *Press Interviews* and 95-8, *Disclosure of Crime Information*.

Any questionable issues, as to the legality or policy of disseminating certain information, shall be resolved by contacting the watch commander, for guidance, prior to releasing such information.

Release of Information to the Media by Patrol and Detective Personnel

When patrol personnel are contacted by the media in the field and a request is made for an interview, or dissemination of information regarding an incident, the deputy shall receive prior approval from a field supervisor before conducting the interview. If duties permit, the field supervisor shall respond to the location prior to any information being released to the media.

In the case of detective bureau personnel, they shall receive prior authorization from their specific sergeant or the detective bureau lieutenant prior to releasing any information.

Contacts by the Media in the Lancaster Station Lobby

Lancaster station personnel having business with media representatives (print, radio, television, etc) shall do so at the public counter. All members of the media shall be afforded the courtesy shown to all members of the public. They are to be provided access to the press boards and any other non-confidential information which they need to complete their inquiry, or to which they are legally entitled.

Station desk personnel are responsible for monitoring the activities of media representatives while at the counter. If desk personnel are unsure of the legality of a request or action by the media, they shall immediately notify the watch sergeant or watch commander.

Media representatives are not allowed to enter the interior of the station without prior approval of the watch commander. When so authorized, they are to be allowed access to areas only specified for their purpose, and accompanied by either the watch sergeant or watch commander.

Code 20 Information

All Code 20 information, disseminated by Lancaster station personnel, shall be in compliance with Department policy. The watch commander will approve all Code 20 reports prior to their release and make a notation in the watch commander's log.

Particular attention shall be given to those incidents which may be beneficial to Lancaster Station's image

The purpose of a Code 20 is to provide the public with information via the media. Due to publication deadlines, timeliness is very important. As soon as the basic facts of a noteworthy incident are available, a Code 20 report shall be made and SIB notified. A copy of the Code 20 report form accompanies this unit order.

Updates shall be disseminated to SIB as the situation develops. Immediately reporting minimal information is, generally, more valuable than waiting for a more thorough, but delayed, report. An incident does not have to be concluded before a Code 20 is issued. The basic information of the incident, where it is located and who is involved will suffice for issuing a Code 20. This can be of great assistance to personnel working at the scene of the noteworthy incident, as it enables SIB to make notification of, and deal with, the media. Consequently, it relieves Lancaster station personnel of some of the responsibility in assisting the press. Personnel must ensure any information released to the media is accurate.

It is critical to remember that constant communication be maintained with SIB so conflicting, or inaccurate, information is not disseminated. This could cause great embarrassment to the Department or even impact a sensitive operation that is in progress. When in doubt, as to releasing information regarding an incident, it shall be resolved by contacting SIB for assistance.

Every effort shall be made to ensure that the media is notified, as soon as is practical, regarding items of news interest in Lancaster station's jurisdiction. When patrol personnel become aware of an event that may generate news interest, they shall notify a field supervisor and the station dispatcher as soon as possible. If duties permit, the field supervisor shall respond to the scene. Additionally, the dispatcher will ensure the watch sergeant, watch commander, and the station public information officer are given the details of the incident.

Personnel must be aware that even in instances of SIB responding to the scene, and assuming the handle of media relations at the scene of a noteworthy incident, the local press may not have knowledge. This is due to many of the smaller media and press outlets not subscribing to wire services. Therefore, it is incumbent upon

the watch commander to ensure that the local press is notified by the watch sergeant or other designated personnel.

All personnel must be aware that a Code 20 and a Sheriff's Operational Log entry are not the same thing. A Code 20 deals with making notification to the media regarding a noteworthy event. An Operational Log entry has to do with contacting Department executives concerning a noteworthy incident. Field Operations Directive 86-11, *Notification and Reporting of Significant Incidents* accompanies this Order for additional reference.

An archive file board shall be maintained in the Watch Sergeant's office of all Code 20 reports. They shall be maintained on the board for no less than three months.

Press Boards

Lancaster Station shall have press boards kept at the Front Counter. The Supervising Sheriff Station Clerk shall be responsible for keeping the press boards up-to-date with reports that are permitted by Department policy and the law.

Community Relations Personnel

Community Relations personnel are a resource that may be particularly valuable with conveying human interest stories to the press. If available, consideration should be given to utilizing them, with the approval of the watch commander or directed patrol lieutenant.
