

**STANDARD OPERATING GUIDELINES FOR
PUBLIC INFORMATION AT EMERGENCY SCENES**

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Introduction

It is the policy of the Western Reserve Joint Fire District to establish and maintain a positive operating relationship with the news media and the public in general.

This directive will establish standard operating guidelines to provide the news media with information normally requested from the Fire District on fire and EMS incidents, to control the movements of media personnel for safety reasons, and to establish an operating framework for Public Information that will effectively integrate into the overall fire ground management system.

Standard Operating Guideline

Command will be responsible for the management of public information on the fire ground. As soon as practical, after basic rescue and fire operations are extended, Command will establish a Public Information Sector or Officer. The effective establishment of this sector/officer will relieve Command of the need to deal directly with the media during critical command stages and will provide the standard information the media will require to accurately report the situation.

Command may assign an officer or company to the Information Sector. The assigned officer will begin to gather information on the incident. The Public Information Officer will station himself/herself in a readily visible and accessible location adjacent to the Command Post to meet and provide information for media personnel.

Radio designation will be "Information Sector".

Individuals assigned to perform Public Information Sector functions should be regulated by the following general guidelines:

- If possible, add anything to the basic information on the form that will enhance the story of the situation; such information may include:
 - A. An extremely hazardous situation;
 - B. A rescue;
 - C. A person or company that did an outstanding job.
- The extra information will make a better story for the reporters and tell the citizens how the Fire Department provides fire and/or EMS services.
- If possible, a personal interview with the Fire Officer or crew member is encouraged.
- Don't be afraid to talk to reporters. They will report the facts as you give them. Tell them everything you can, but make sure everything you tell them is correct.

Usually, during the time you are gathering information, you will have inquiries from reporters seeking information. Give them what you have at that point and emphasize that this information is tentative. If it gets to the point that questions from reporters are keeping you from gathering information, use these alternatives:

Tell the reporters to gather in one place and that you will return shortly with more information.

1. Request additional manpower from Command to utilize for assistance in gathering information and stay with the reporters.
2. Tell the reporters to go ahead and get pictures and film footage without interfering with fire ground operations while you are gathering information. Make sure and point out the hazard zone. Arrange to meet them shortly at a location to give them facts.
3. If they have deadlines to meet, get a phone number(s) where they can be reached and phone the facts to them as soon as possible.
4. **BEFORE RELEASING NAMES OF PERSONS INJURED OR DECEASED, MAKE SURE NEXT OF KIN HAS BEEN NOTIFIED.** Notifications are usually handled by police and/or hospitals. Ask the Dispatch supervisor to check with P.D. or hospital to confirm that next of kin has been notified. **DO NOT USE THE NAMES OF DECEASED OR INJURED PERSONS OVER THE RADIO UNTIL NOTIFICATION OF NEXT OF KIN HAS BEEN CONFIRMED.**

The individual or company assigned to this Section may be required to escort media on an orientation tour of the fire damage area following knockdown. This must be cleared with Command and coordinated operating sectors before entering the area.

The Public Information Section will be responsible for requiring that all media personnel wear proper protective clothing on the fire ground when needed.

Each Sector Officer is responsible for the safety of media personnel in the area. If media personnel create a safety problem, or hinder operations, they should be requested to move in a positive manner - **AVOIDING CONFRONTATIONS**. The policy of the Department is to cooperate with the media.

The PIO will have access to a phone line to contact all news agencies on the telephone.

The following guidelines will describe the information that is normally requested or provided.

1. Reporters are interested in the number of units that respond to the incident, not necessarily their unit designation. They are also interested in total personnel figures.

Example: 4 Engines + 2 Ladders + 1 Chief = y units and 23 firefighters.

2. The media will also want to know how long it took the Department to get on the scene, and how long it took to control the situation. Volunteer the other information if it is not asked for.
3. Tell what the first unit on the scene encountered and the action taken. Example: Engine 30 arrived on the scene and the house was well involved. E-30 officer ordered a quick attack with 1-1/2" lines and ordered Ladder 30 to search and rescue and to secure the utilities. Ladder 30 removed 1 victim who was treated at the scene by Rescue 30. Interviews with first in captains or OICs are encouraged.
4. In the event of injuries, fire or civilian, list the full name where taken for treatment. In case of fatality - omit extent of injury. Do not release this information until next of kin is notified.
5. Note specific hazards encountered (i.e., toxic materials, flammable liquids, etc.) and/or special accomplishments (i.e., rescues, good salvage work, etc.).
6. Also note points about private fire protection (i.e., fire was stopped by sprinkler system, a smoke detector may have possibly prevented this fatality, etc.).
7. Use investigator figures for dollar loss estimate. If figure is not available, use a word assessment (i.e., heavy, moderate, etc.).