



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Law Enforcement

TITLE: PUBLIC INFORMATION

GENERAL ORDER	EFFECTIVE DATE	RESCINDS/AMENDS	Applicability
54	May 16, 2017	August 24, 2011	All Members

References

Ch. 119, 794, 800 and 827 F.S.; IMPP 1.7; GO 33
CFA 1.06 and 1.07M

1 POLICY

- A** It is the policy of the Division of Law Enforcement to cooperate with news media representatives in their efforts to gather factual public information pertaining to the activities of the Division, as long as these activities do not unduly interfere with Division operations, infringe on individual rights or violate state or federal laws.
- B** It is the policy of the Division of Law Enforcement to provide guidance to members on the release and dissemination of public information, balancing the public's right to know with the operational needs of the Division and the privacy needs of victims and witnesses in accordance with Chapter 119, Florida Statutes and other applicable statutes.
- C** It is the policy of the Division of Law Enforcement to adhere to the Chapter 119, Florida Statutes as it pertains to the release of information and public records and to acknowledge that said Chapter takes precedence over this General Order.
- D Definitions**
 - (1) **Media** – means of communication reaching the general public such as radio, television and newspapers.
 - (2) **Public Information** – information that may be of interest to the general public regarding policy, procedures or events involving the Division, or other newsworthy information that is not legally protected, does not unduly interfere with the mission of the Division, infringe upon the rights of a defendant or compromise the legitimate safety and privacy interests of members, victims, witnesses and others.
 - (3) **Public Information Coordinator (PIC)** – is a Commission Office of the Executive Director (OED)/Community Relations Office (CRO) member with primary responsibility for media relations within a region. Additionally, the PIC serves as a coordinator for conservation stewardship, public awareness and employee awareness efforts in a region.
 - (4) **Public Information Officer (PIO)** – A sworn member who has been recognized by the Regional Commander as a Division media representative. The regional PIO works closely with the regional PIC and the Division PIC, and is often required to conduct on-camera interviews for requesting media.
 - (5) **Community Relations Office (CRO)** – The FWC's Community Relations Office coordinates communication to and interaction with the print and electronic news media. This includes news

releases, press conferences, and one-on-one interaction with the press.

- (6) **Division Public Information Coordinator (DLE)** – is the GHQ and statewide representative for the Division of Law Enforcement with responsibility for media relations and public outreach.
- (7) **News Release** – is a Division written news story which is sent to all media.
- (8) **Media Advisory** – notifies the media of an upcoming Division event. This usually occurs in the form of a news conference, where members of the media meet at a specific time and location.
- (9) **FWC Alert** – notifies the public of an important occurrence or event such as a red tide alert, or captive wildlife escape, which poses a health risk.
- (10) **FWC Announcement** – serves as an announcement which is used for classes, workshops and other events not requiring media attention.
- (11) **Talking Points** – The summarized facts of a case, mutually agreed upon by CRO and DLE, which will be used when addressing media questions.
- (12) **News Media Representative** – those individuals who are directly employed by agencies of the electronic or print media such as radio, television and newspaper. Freelance workers in this field are to be regarded as other members of the public unless they possess valid credentials identifying them as media representatives. Freelance journalists and non-legacy media workers such as internet journalists, bloggers, etc. may be considered as news media representatives in accordance with this General Order if the Division's Public Information Coordinator and/or the Commission's Community Relations Office can verify their legitimacy via reference checks or verification of past work products. The Division also accepts current press passes/media credentials issued by other law enforcement agencies.

2 RESPONSIBILITIES

A Members

- (1) All members shall treat representatives of the media in a courteous and professional manner.
- (2) Members shall assist media representatives in identifying the appropriate contact, usually the regional PIC, Division PIC, regional PIO or the member designated by the Regional Commander/Section Leader as media liaison.
- (3) Members shall not respond individually to editorials, columns or other news articles generated by the media using their title or position in the FWC Division of Law Enforcement.
- (4) Any member may be designated by their Regional Commander/Section Leader to serve in a media liaison function. More than one member may be designated by the Regional Commander/Section Leader. A member assigned to media liaison functions shall coordinate releases with the regional PIC or the Division PIC at GHQ. Those members assigned media liaison duties shall receive training from the regional PIC or the Division PIC at GHQ on best practices and procedures in media relations.

B Regional Public Information Coordinator (PIC) and Division Public Information Coordinator (DLE)

- (1) The regional PIC works for the Regional Director, and coordinates media relations with the Regional Commander/Section Leader and the Director of Community Relations; the Division PIC works for the Division of Law Enforcement's Deputy Chief and is responsible for the following:
 - (a) Assisting the media in covering news stories and at crime scenes.
 1. In the event the regional PIC, regional PIO, or Division PIC is not available, a member designated by the Regional Commander/Section Leader may assume the responsibilities of the PIC.

2. All media assists, including interviews, shall be reported to the regional PIC as soon as possible after completion.
 3. Any information released shall be made equally available to all requesting media representatives.
- (b) Being available for on-call responses to the news media.
 - (c) Preparing and distributing Division news releases including use of social media.
 1. All news releases shall be prepared by the regional PIC, regional PIO, or Division PIC.
 2. All written news releases regarding the Division of Law Enforcement or related to law enforcement issues which have significant or controversial application shall be routed through the Division PIC.
 - (d) Arranging for, and assisting in news conferences. Regional news conferences shall be at the discretion and approval of the Regional Commander and may include those members appointed by the Regional Commander.
 - (e) Coordinating and authorizing the release of information about victims, witnesses and suspects.
 - (f) Coordinating and authorizing the release of information concerning confidential investigations and operations in accordance with Florida Statutes and Division policies and procedures. The regional or Division PIC must have the explicit approval of the Regional Commander, who shall confirm release with the Director or appropriate Deputy Director.

3 PROCEDURES

A Release of Information

- (1) Only the regional PIC, Division PIC, Regional Commander/Section Leader or designee(s), Division Director or designee(s) or the Director of Community Relations or designee(s) may release stories or statements to members of the media.
- (2) The address, telephone number, photograph or other personal information of any current or former member, or a member's spouse or children will not be released to any person outside of the Division. All confidential information may be released only by consent of the Director or designee(s).
 - (a) The Division PIC may release the photo of a member to accompany an agency news release if requested by the media and if the member approves of the release.
- (3) When multiple agencies are involved in an investigation, the lead agency shall be responsible for releasing, or coordinating the release, of media information. Information received from other agencies will not be released without their concurrence.

B Public Records Requests

- (1) Release of information in response to public records requests can be authorized by the Regional Commander/Section Leader or designee for records that are maintained in the Regional Office. However, release of records regarding personnel, finance and budget, internal investigations, or other records and reports specifically identified can only be authorized by the appropriate Deputy Director at GHQ or designee.
- (2) Public records shall be made available in accordance with Chapter 119, Florida Statutes and FWC Internal Management Policy and Procedure 1.7, *Commission Records*.

C Arrest/Seizure/Recovery Information

- (1) Following an arrest, issuance of an arrest warrant or filing of an information or indictment, or following a significant seizure or recovery, it is permissible to release:

- (a) The name, sex, age, and address of a person arrested or of the victim of a crime except as provided in Chapter 119, Florida Statutes.
 - (b) The time and place of arrest, whether pursuit or resistance was encountered, whether weapons were used, charges placed against the suspect, and a description of any contraband or other evidence that was seized.
 - (c) The identity of the arresting officers and the duration of the investigation, unless the officers are engaged in undercover operations.
 - (d) The amount of bond, scheduled court dates and place of the suspect's detention.
 - (e) The type, size and location of a seizure or recovery.
- (2) Each field office is responsible for forwarding the relevant information on significant cases to the regional or Division PIC as soon as feasible.

D Investigative information

- (1) From the initial stage of a criminal investigation until the completion of trial or disposition without trial, Division personnel shall refer all requests for information to the regional or Division PIC.
- (2) Information that may be released in connection with the investigation of an unusual incident or crime includes:
- (a) The type or nature of the incident or crime.
 - (b) The location, date and time, injuries sustained and a general description of the crime.
 - (c) Number of members or people involved in the event or investigation and length of the investigation.
 - (d) Name and rank of the member in charge of the investigation.
 - (e) The identity of any critically injured or deceased person after notification of next of kin.
- (3) Information that may **not** be released in connection with the investigation of an unusual incident or crime unless authorized by the Division Director, Deputy Director or designee(s) in accordance with Florida Statute includes:
- (a) The identity and photograph of a suspect, including members of the Division of Law Enforcement, prior to arrest unless such information would aid in apprehending the suspect and/ or serve to warn the public of potential danger.
 - (b) The identity of a person who is the victim of any sexual offenses described in Chapters 794 and 800, Florida Statutes, or is the victim of child abuse as described in Chapter 827, Florida Statutes.
 - (c) The identity, testimony or credibility of victims or witnesses if such disclosure would prejudice an investigation or if it would place the victim in personal danger.
 - (d) The identity of a confidential informant or individuals with a protected status.
 - (e) The name, photographs and address of any juvenile who is a suspect or defendant in a case subject to the jurisdiction of the juvenile court. The exception is any juvenile who has been taken into custody by a member for a violation, which, if committed by an adult, would be a felony.
 - (f) The identity of any critically injured or deceased person, prior to notification of next of kin.
 - (g) The results of any investigative procedures such as lineups, polygraph examinations, fingerprint comparisons, ballistic tests or other similar procedures. The fact that these tests have been performed may be revealed without further comment.
 - (h) Active criminal investigation information, as defined in Chapter 119, Florida Statutes, except those items specifically mentioned in this chapter.

- (i) Opinions of members regarding the guilt or innocence of the suspect or merits of the case.
- (j) The prior criminal record, character or reputation of the accused, or the existence of any confession, admission of guilt, or statements or refusal of statements made by the suspect, including members of the Division of Law Enforcement.
- (k) Specific cause of death, unless officially determined by a medical examiner.

E Media Access on Scene

- (1) The regional PIO, or Division PIC shall coordinate media access with the law enforcement supervisor at the scene.
- (2) Media representatives, including photographers, shall not be allowed access to any area or scene of an incident or crime where there is a possibility that evidence may be damaged, altered, destroyed or otherwise prejudiced by its existence being published or portrayed.
 - (a) On private property, photography, film or videotape recording requires the permission of the owner or the owner’s representative. If there is no owner or representative available, media access shall be denied. However, this does not prevent the media from photographing, filming or videotape recording private property, provided the photographer/videographer remains on public property.
 - (b) Suspects or accused persons in custody shall not be posed or arrangements made for photographs, telecasts or interviews, nor shall Division personnel pose with suspects or accused persons in custody.
- (3) Media representatives shall not be allowed access to the scenes of major fires, natural disasters, crash sites or other catastrophic events if their presence interferes with the mission of the agency, fire, medical or other emergency relief workers. However, media representatives should not be prevented access to any area solely because of the possibility of injury or death. If this is the only consideration, the media representative should be advised of the danger and allowed to make the decision to enter on his/her own volition.

F Media Representatives in State Vehicles or Vessels

- (1) General Order 33, *Operation of Division Equipment* shall be applicable for all media requests to ride in State vehicles or vessels.

G Movie and Television procedures for the FWC Division of Law Enforcement

- (1) Members shall refer the Movie or TV production representative to the Division of Law Enforcement’s Media Relations Coordinator (Division PIC) at GHQ for coordination and contract approval, if applicable.

4 FORMS

FORM NUMBER	FORM TITLE