

Policy Name:	PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS		
Policy #:	AD 9.8	Last Updated:	2022-07-13
Issued By:	OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTABLE	Approved By:	SURREY POLICE BOARD
		Review Frequency:	AS REQUIRED

RELATED POLICIES

AD 9.7 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act

AD 9.17 Social Media

AD 9.18 Security and Confidentiality of Records and Information

OP 4.1 AMBER Alert

OP 4.19.1 Duty to Warn – Public Interest Notification

OP 4.35 Missing Persons Investigations

1. PURPOSE

1.1. To inform Surrey Police Service (SPS) Employees of the appropriate avenues for disclosing information to the public, the Media, and external audiences.

2. SCOPE

2.1. This policy applies to all SPS Employees.

3. POLICY

3.1. The public has a right to know about the services SPS performs on their behalf, but this right is not absolute. The public’s right to personal information about individuals who encounter the police or need help from the police is governed by the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIPPA). Furthermore, many police operations and tactics must remain confidential to

maintain their effectiveness. Subject to these restrictions, SPS's position is to be open with the Media, both in a reactive and a proactive mode.

- 3.2. SPS policy and FOIPPA restricts Media access to police reports and investigations. Employees must not provide the Media with investigative reports or information relating to police data or incidents except in accordance with SPS information sharing policies, FOIPPA and the advance approval of the Communications Section.
- 3.3. Individuals who have been designated as official SPS spokespersons by the Chief Constable and Manager, Strategic Communications will handle most Media inquiries. However other Employees may serve as spokespersons, on occasion, at the request of or with the approval of the Manager, Strategic Communications. Duty Officers will respond to Media inquiries on routine, unfolding incidents when the Communications Section is off duty.
- 3.4. To ensure strategic and consistent internal and external communications, and to remove responsibility for these matters from other Members and civilian Employees, the Communications Section is responsible for producing and supervising the production of all Communication and Marketing Materials in support of public relations, media relations, and staff communications.

4. PROCEDURE

Disclosure of Information

- 4.1. Disclosure of crime-related information and other SPS-related information to the Media is the responsibility of the Communications Section.
- 4.2. When Members are at the scene of an incident that has generated or is likely to generate Media and public interest, the Supervisor at the scene must notify the Duty Officer as soon as practicable, so that the Duty Officer can notify the Communications Section.
- 4.3. When Media is at the scene of an incident and the Communications Section is unavailable, the Duty Officer or Supervisor at a scene may disclose general information about the incident (except information as described s. 4.8 and s. 4.9 below). If the incident is political in nature, likely to attract significant and/or national media attention, could threaten the reputation of SPS, involves the conduct of an SPS Employee, and/or the IIO, the Communications Section must be called, even if off duty.
- 4.4. Members from other bureaus may also disclose information, when asked to provide their expertise by the Communications Section, or when permitted by this policy.

4.5. Section Managers may approve Media interviews of their Employees and may delegate this approval as appropriate; however, they must notify the Communications Section before the interview.

4.6. All Media inquiries must be referred to the Communications Section. If a member of the Communications Section is not available, media inquiries related to in-progress or high-profile incidents will be referred to the Duty Officer.

4.7. Members approved to give on-camera Media interviews must be in uniform.

Information Not to be Disclosed

4.8. Employees must not disclose information to the Media when disclosure of the information could:

- i. jeopardize or hinder an investigation or operation (e.g., the disclosure of hold-back information);
- ii. endanger human life (e.g., a ransom kidnapping);
- iii. interfere with a sensitive investigation (e.g., reporting a suicide);
- iv. prejudice court proceedings or violate the rights of an accused (e.g., commenting on cases before the courts without a valid operational need to do so);
- v. be reasonably considered as personal opinion and/or speculative;
- vi. violate the law (e.g., releasing the name of a Young Person or the names of family members which may identify the youth); and
- vii. breach a court-ordered publication ban that restricts disclosure of information.

4.9. To protect a person's privacy, Employees must not disclose the following information about an individual, unless the person involved consents or the Communications Section authorizes its disclosure after consultation with the Information and Privacy Unit:

- i. names of deceased persons unless next-of-kin consent to disclosure of the name or the name is already known to the public, or disclosure of the name is required to further a police investigation;
- ii. names of injured persons;
- iii. names of suspects, unless confirmed criminal charges have been laid (or as provided in section 4.11 below);
- iv. names of victims and witnesses;
- v. cause of death before it is determined by the BC Coroners Service;
- vi. medical information/history related to a missing person, suspect or victim;
- vii. address of a victim, witness, suspect or accused;
- viii. the street address of crimes where the location is a residence; and
- ix. racial origin of the accused (except as provided in section 4.12 and 4.13 below).

4.10. The Media will be notified of the reason why information is withheld whenever possible.

Information that May be Released

4.11. When an Employee discloses information to the Media about an incident, the following types of information may be disclosed:

- i. nature and time of the incident – including a general description of what appears to have taken place;
- ii. location of the incident; however, if the location is a residence, only the hundred block of where the incident occurred may be disclosed; if there is only one residence in a larger geographic area, the location description disclosed to the Media may be less detailed;
- iii. description of suspect(s) involved – adults suspects may be named once charged with a criminal offence relating to the incident; and
- iv. except as provided in section 4.12 and 4.13 below, no reference is to be made to the race, colour, ethnicity, or sexual orientation of the suspect or accused;
- v. the victim's age and gender; and
- vi. that a victim is deceased, provided that an official pronouncement of death has been made by the BC Coroners Service, next of kin have been notified, and disclosure of this information will not adversely affect an investigation.

4.12. If a missing person is deemed to be high risk by the lead investigator, the lead investigator may request the Communications Section to issue a news release. The news release may include the missing person's name, gender, age, physical and clothing descriptors, and last known location. Medical information should not be disclosed unless it is part of the essential descriptive information about the missing person. A photo of the individual should be included with the news release, with the consent of the family. Once the individual has been located, a news release must be issued to report that the individual has been located, and the original news release must be removed from the website, along with the individual's photo. All original social media posts/photos of the missing person must also be removed from SPS channels (see OP 4.35 *Missing Person Investigations*; OP 4.1 *AMBER Alert*).

4.13. If a suspect is still at large and it is necessary to assist in identifying and apprehending the suspect, and to protect the public, Employees may disclose personal information related to the suspect, including name, aliases, race, colour, ethnic background, or sexual orientation. This information should only be disclosed when it is relevant and essential to the investigation.

4.14. Police photographs of suspects accused or convicted persons may be disclosed to the Media when attempting to locate a person wanted by the police. Employees must ensure the disclosure of the photograph will not adversely affect ongoing investigations.

Public Interest Notification

- 4.15. Section 25 of FOIPPA imposes a duty to warn the public, or an affected group of people, information about a risk of significant harm to the environment or to the health or safety of the public or a group of people, or the disclosure of which is, for any other reason, clearly in the public interest.
- 4.16. The Communications Section must consult the Superintendent, Investigative Services Bureau, the SPS General Counsel and the Information and Privacy Unit, to seek authorization for the disclosure of public warnings and the required notifications (see OP 4.19.1 *Duty to Warn – Public Interest Notification*).

Disclosure of Information about Employees

- 4.17. Pursuant to FOIPPA, the name of an Employee who has been suspended, whether with or without pay, must not be disclosed to the Media – only confirmation of the suspension will be provided, and only by the Communications Section.
- 4.18. If criminal charges against an Employee are approved, the name of the Employee may be disclosed to the Media. For charges involving Members, further information may be disclosed, as required by processes outlined in the *Police Act*, and to the extent necessary to prosecute a violation of law.

Media Video Recording in a Public Place

- 4.19. Members must restrict the Media and all unauthorized persons from entering a crime scene; however, Members must be aware that the Media, and other persons, have the right to video record, audio record and photograph anyone or any event in a public place, including police officers and their actions.
- 4.20. Where a concern exists about the public identifying a suspect under arrest or detention, the suspect's face should be covered before being brought into a public place. In the case of a Young Person's arrest, Members should, if practical, tell the Media prior to the Young Person being brought into a public place.

Written Media Releases

- 4.21. All written news releases, and Media advisories are to be produced by the Communications Section, and if practicable, they will be approved by the Manager, Strategic Communications before distribution to the Media. News releases should be sent to involved Members and/or Supervisors for their information and verification, if appropriate prior to release. When the Communications Section is off-duty, basic news releases on unfolding events can be issued to Media by the Duty Officer.

Feature Stories

4.22. A request by the Media for a feature story or in-depth interview with an Employee must be submitted in writing to the Communications Section. The request will be forwarded to the Manager, Strategic Communications, who will liaise with the appropriate Supervisor. Interview and feature story requests are subject to the Employee's willingness to participate. Employees may terminate their participation in interviews and feature story requests at any time.

Pre-Planned Events

4.23. Employees responsible for planning major events involving significant SPS resources, SPS-related ceremonies, or planned events where the Media is anticipated to be in attendance, must notify the Communications Section in advance. Requests for the attendance of a member of the Communications Section must be submitted to the Manager, Strategic Communications.

Statements Made on Behalf of SPS

4.24. An Employee who wishes to speak to the Media on behalf of SPS must provide advance notice to the Communications Section and must first obtain approval from the Manager, Strategic Communications.

Corrections

4.25. Due diligence will be applied to ensure the accuracy of every statement, written or verbal, issued by the Communications Section. If a substantive error is made, every effort will be made to correct the error and notify the Media, member of the public, or affected person, of the error and correction.

Standards and Production of Communication and Marketing Material

4.26. All Communication and Marketing Material must be approved by the Communications Section before being internally or externally distributed or made public.

4.27. The Communications Section must be consulted at the concept stage of Communication and Marketing Material development, to ensure the strategic need for, and alignment of, the material.

4.28. Communication and Marketing Material will:

- i. follow SPS graphic and brand standards established, and made available, by the Communications Section (e.g., standards for the use of any crests, logos, colours, and positioning statements);
- ii. not contain any information conflicting with SPS key messages; and
- iii. convey high standards of professionalism.

Production and Posting of Content to the SPS Intranet Site

4.29. Postings to the SPS intranet site must be approved by the Communications Section.

4.30. The Communications Section has final creative control over all requested postings and is available to assist Employees with design and content.

4.31. The Communications Section is responsible for posting approved content, and removing posted content, from the SPS intranet site.

Advertising

4.32. The Communications Section has primary responsibility for the design, purchase, placement, and rollout of all SPS advertising.

Recruiting Campaigns

4.33. Developing and producing Communication and Marketing Material for recruiting Members and civilian Employees is the primary responsibility of the Communications Section.

Crime Prevention

4.34. Designing and implementing public communication for crime prevention campaigns, in support of SPS global, and section-specific, crime reduction strategies and objectives, is the primary responsibility of, or must otherwise be approved by, the Communications Section.

Printing and Design Services

4.35. The Communications Section must be consulted prior to retaining external printing or graphic design services, or ordering branded promotional items.

APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS

“Communication and Marketing Material” means anything in a physical, electronic, or other medium, designed specifically to promote the SPS, or a program or initiative of the SPS, to internal or external audiences. These marketing media include but are not limited to brochures, posters, booklets, broadcast spots, videos, films, Internet postings, broadcast emails, speeches, PowerPoint presentations, stickers, cards, newsletters, publications, challenge coins, clothing, and SPS-branded merchandise.

“Employee” means a sworn Member or civilian Employee appointed by the Surrey Police Board.

“External Audience” means any individual, group or organization outside Surrey Police Service, the Surrey Police Board, and the Surrey Police Union.

“Media” means information or data that is published or transmitted by a third-party in any form (digital, electronic, print, etc.).

“Member” means a Sworn Police Officer appointed by the Surrey Police Board.

“Supervisor” means a Team Leader, Manager, Staff Sergeant, Inspector, Superintendent, Deputy Chief Constable, Chief Constable and any other person acting in a supervisory capacity who is accountable for a particular area or shift on behalf of SPS.

APPENDIX B: REFERENCES

British Columbia Provincial Policing Standards

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 165

Human Rights Code, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 210

Police Act, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 367