

I. GOAL

The City of Idaho Falls seeks to inform its residents, businesses and others by engaging in a proactive communications program. This program recognizes that one of the most effective and quickest methods to communicate City policies and activities to residents is by working in partnership with the news media.

II. PURPOSE

Disseminating public information increases positive awareness and transparency and enhances the image of the City through a variety of media and public relations approaches. Specific publicity plans are developed according to the particulars of a news item or event, and targeted for appropriate media placement and distribution.

III. AUTHORIZATION

The Mayor's Office, Public Information Officers (PIOs) and Department Directors authorize the release of information for the City of Idaho Falls. Authorized personnel from those departments maintain a close working relationship with editors, reporters and staff of the electronic, print, television and radio media throughout the Idaho Falls area. The PIOs, Mayor, City Councilmembers, Department Directors and supervisors, and PIO-designated communication team members are the official spokespersons for the City.

IV. MEDIA INQUIRES

Inquiries from the news media are given a high priority by the City and should be responded to as quickly and efficiently as practical. Every effort should be made to meet media deadlines and to ensure that all information released is accurate.

Any media inquiries received by City employees should be referred immediately to the appropriate Department Director or Assistant Director who will then inform the PIO. If the Department Director or Assistant Director is not available, employees will inform the PIO directly. The employee should obtain the reporter's name, office and cell phone numbers, and their deadline.

V. SENSITIVE OR CONTROVERSIAL INQUIRES

All television, radio, newspaper or other media inquiries regarding sensitive or controversial issues should always be referred immediately to the Department Director or Assistant Director who will notify the PIO. The PIO will then coordinate a response, including a designated spokesperson, after consulting with the Mayor, City Attorney and the appropriate Director.

VI. LITIGATION, PERSONNEL AND ELECTION ISSUES



Media Relations Policy

Generally, the business conducted by the City is public and, therefore, is public information. Inquiries regarding pending litigation, matters involving a significant exposure to litigation and certain personnel-related information are exceptions.

Inquiries regarding pending litigation, including criminal investigations and prosecution, or exposure to litigation should be referred to the City Attorney and the Police PIO. Inquiries regarding personnel-related information should be referred to the Human Resource Director and the City PIO. The PIO(s) or Directors will notify the Mayor.

Inquiries regarding election and campaign issues should be referred to the City Clerk or Assistant City Clerk. The City Clerk will contact the Mayor, City Attorney and the City PIO as appropriate.

VII. PERSONAL POINTS OF VIEW

It is recognized that all employees have the right to their personal points of view regarding any issue. However, personal points of view may conflict with the City's official policy. Therefore, City employees who write letters to the editor of any newspaper may not use official City stationary or City email addresses. If an employee chooses to identify himself or herself as a City employee in any personal letter or email to the editor, he or she must include language which states "the views set forth in the letter do not represent the views of the City, but rather, are the employee's personally held opinions." Similar disclaimers must be given if an employee addresses a public meeting, participates in a radio or television talk show, or posts on social media sites, unless the employee is officially representing the City.

VIII. GENERAL OR ROUTINE ISSUES

Calls from broadcast media (TV and radio) or print media (newspaper) should always be referred immediately to the appropriate PIO or the Department Director or Assistant Director who will notify the PIO. The PIO will then coordinate a response, including a spokesperson.

IX. CITY-INITIATED INFORMATION

Proactive media contact is initiated through the PIO. This includes issuing press releases and media advisories as well as personal contacts with reporters and editors for coverage. Departments seeking publicity for events or activities should submit the request to the PIO as soon as possible to ensure the best media coverage of their activities. Departments should not initiate news media contacts before notifying the PIO.

X. GENERATING INFORMATION FOR RELEASE

City employees are encouraged to call the PIOs to convey information about city programs, grants, projects, events, achievements, etc., so the information can be communicated to the

media and shared with the public. Contact should be made during the initial planning stages of events, programs or meetings so that appropriate media plans may be developed.

- All media plans and publicity initiatives must be determined by the PIO, working in conjunction with department representatives.
- All information must be disseminated by the PIO or PIO designee on official City template, website page and/or social media page.
- All official publicity photography or videography must be arranged by the PIO.
- All photographs or videos taken with a city-owned device such as, but not limited to, smart phone or an iPad, are the property of the City of Idaho Falls.

To maximize coverage and allow scheduling for printing and dissemination, all story ideas and information must be submitted for press releases and general coverage as follows:

- Event press releases – at least 2 weeks in advance of event, earlier if a call to action is needed (i.e. vendors needed for a city-sponsored event).
- Construction press releases – at least 2 days prior to the start of the project, if possible.
- Urgent press release – alert the PIO by contacting via phone, particularly if the release is needed after hours or on a weekend.
- Emergency press release – contact the designated PIO immediately by phone.

Note that certain publicity approaches require extensive lead time because of deadlines set by publications or stations.

XI. SOCIAL MEDIA

See Social Media Policy.

XII. PUBLIC SAFETY

The Police and Fire Departments operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and generate a high volume of media calls. Those departments have designated personnel as media spokespersons and follow specific guidelines when releasing information.

XIII. PUBLIC SAFETY CONTACT INFORMATION

- Any media calls to other City employees regarding police inquiries should be referred immediately to the Police Department.
- For media contact on weekdays, major crimes or officer-involved critical response incidents contact the Police PIO at (208) 612-8655 or (208) 589-3091.
- For daily incident information (Monday-Friday) contact the Police PIO. Weekend incidents (unless a critical response) will be reported by the Police PIO on Monday.
- Media contact for nights, weekends and holidays are directed to the Patrol Shift Supervisor at (208) 529-1200. The Patrol Shift Supervisor is able to provide basic

information on breaking crimes or crimes that occur on his or her shift. Note that when contacting the Shift Supervisor immediately after a report goes out over the radio, the Supervisor will likely have no more information than the media does. It may be a least 30 minutes after a call that details are available for release.

- Shift Supervisors are in the Patrol Department and are not briefed on cases that involve Detectives or ongoing investigations. Plan accordingly if weekend or evening updates are needed for ongoing investigations.
- Fire inquiries should be referred immediately to the Fire Department PIO at (208) 612-8122. The on-duty Battalion Chief serves as the back-up PIO.
- In the event of a major incident, the Chiefs or department directors should notify the Mayor who will inform the City Council. If the Mayor is absent, the City Council President should be notified who will then inform Council Members.

XIV. INFORMATION GENERALLY AVAILABLE ON CRIMES & ARRESTS

- Type or nature of an event or crime;
- Location, date, time, damages, general description of incident;
- Name, sex, age of person arrested (with the exception of a minor);
- Time/place of arrest; and
- Location of suspect's detention.
- Amount of bond is available from the Bonneville County Jail (208) 529-1315 or the Bonneville County Prosecutor's Office (208) 529-1348.
- Names of officers involved in critical incidents will be released as soon as possible.
- The City of Idaho Falls does not release names of victims of crimes.

While this information is generally available, certain facts relating to the event, incident, or crime may cause this information to be exempt from disclosure under the Idaho Public Records Act. The Police Department will evaluate each request for information on a case by case basis. The same evaluation will be performed for each of the following two categories of information:

XV. INFORMATION THAT MAY BE AVAILABLE

- Specific cause of death, after officially determined by the coroner; and
- Very general description of injuries sustained, in contrast with specific medical conditions, as viewed by the officers (as opposed to specific medical conditions).
- Photographs may be released through the Police Department when available.
- Names of suspects age fourteen (14) or older charged with an actual crime may be released upon the approval of the Chief of Police and City Attorney.

XVI. INFORMATION NOT AVAILABLE TO THE MEDIA

- The Police Department does not release names or addresses of victims and witnesses. The Department's professional and ethical responsibility is in preserving a victim's dignity, privacy, and resolving whatever crime has been committed against them.
- Prior to arrest, the identity and/or address of a person alleged to be involved in a particularly sensitive, extreme or violent crime such as rape or domestic abuse.
- The identities of suspects before their arrest absent a warrant, unless the release is necessary for public assistance in apprehension or to warn of danger.
- Identity of juveniles under the age of eighteen (18), unless charged as an adult.
- Child protection matters are also protected by law. Children taken into protective custody for whatever reason are provided protection of their identities and status under state and federal statutes.
- Medical conditions, unless permission is specifically given by the victim or the victim's family (HIPAA).
- Diagnosed or suspected mental illness are medical conditions protected under the medical records provision of the Public Records Act. The Police Department may only be able to refer you to the Department of Health & Welfare; however, they too are restricted in providing information due to patient's privacy rights.
- Any information prematurely released that could interfere with a police investigation including the apprehension of suspects, information regarding a lead, methods of operation or any other information that may cause a suspect to flee or avoid arrest.
- Information that would disclose investigative techniques or would endanger the life or safety of law enforcement personnel.
- Evidence that may adversely affect a court proceeding.
- Results of any investigative procedure, such as lineups, polygraph tests, ballistic tests, etc.
- The contents of a statement by the accused.

XVII. CRIME SCENES

- The media cannot be restricted from taking recordings if they are on public property, outside the cordoned area of the crime scene and open to public view. Media recordings taken from outside the crime scene on private property also cannot be restricted unless access is denied by the property owner.
- Law enforcement officers may answer questions from the media concerning a situation in which they are directly involved, provided it doesn't interfere with their duties and meets department guidelines related to investigation.

Media Relations Policy

- The media should follow directions given by officers on scene. If a member of the media believes that an officer is unduly restricting their right of access, they are invited to immediately contact the Shift Supervisor, if available, or if unavailable, the Chief of Police for quick resolution.
- A special perimeter will not be set up for crime scenes. If an area is safe for the media, it must also be safe for the public. However, in some cases, media may be allowed in a restricted area for better access. Before the crime scene perimeter is set, the department requests media cooperation in working with officers at the crime scene.
- A suspect becomes a suspect when an arrest warrant is issued. Prior to that, their name may be released as a request to locate a “person of interest wanted for questioning.” A person of interest may also simply turn out to be a witness, as the investigation progresses. Prior to an arrest warrant being issued, the Police Department will likely withhold the identity of a person alleged or suspected to be involved in a sensitive or extreme crime (see above), in the interest of personal privacy.
- The Police Department makes information for which it is the “custodian” available pursuant to the Idaho Public Records Law (Idaho Code §§ 9-335 through 9-350). Although the department intends to make such information and records readily available, records for which the City or department is not the custodian and records that would constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy are exempt from disclosure.
- The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), provides people with privacy regarding their healthcare treatment and medical conditions by restricting the type of information that can be released by anyone other than the patient. HIPAA may limit the information the City can release if 1) the City is acting as a healthcare provider (e.g., providing ambulance services), 2) the information the City possesses contains an individual’s protected health information and/or (3) it involves a record created by a healthcare provider, (e.g., Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center). Because of these restrictions, the Police Department is unable to provide media with specific medical conditions or exact types of injuries. Except for general descriptions of injuries sustained at a crime or accident scene, as pertinent to the crime or accident that occurred, victim or family approval is necessary for the public release of this information by the department. This is usually unattainable during the time police are involved in an incident, but may become available subsequently. If these scenarios do apply, the Police Department will evaluate each scenario on a case by case basis to determine what information, if any, may be released.

- If officers are currently looking into a situation, the department may or may not be able to confirm the investigation. Releasing news about an ongoing investigation prematurely could jeopardize the investigation and possibly the officer or public safety. Department response depends on many factors, including the preservation of the integrity of the investigation.
- The Police Department can assist with researching statistical information regarding crime within Idaho Falls. Please allow for time to collect and gather information.

XVIII. MEDIA RIDE-ALONG REQUESTS

When requesting a ride-along with an officer or other City employee, contact the appropriate PIO as soon as possible to allow for ample time to complete and submit the necessary waiver and application. The PIO will then make arrangements with the officer or employee.

XIX. COURT INFORMATION REQUESTS

The Police Department handles the investigative phase. Requests for public information including hearing dates, audio and video requests, etc., need to be directed to the courts or to the Prosecutor's Office.

XX. QUESTIONS ABOUT PAST INCIDENTS

Provide as much specific information as possible about the incident to the Police Department. Times, places or names can be disclosed and information provided pursuant to the Idaho Public Records Law.

XXI. POLICE REPORTS

Police officers address criminal matters and often respond to calls where no criminal activity appears to have taken place. In that case, oftentimes no police report is made. Civil situations like neighbor disputes over property lines, water disputes or landlord-tenant disputes, fire or EMS assists often do not result in police reports.

Police occasionally respond to injury accidents such as construction accidents or falls. In these instances, where there is no criminal intent, a police report may or may not be generated.