

**Carlsbad Police Department
Professional Standards & Services Division
Standard Operating Procedures**



Crisis Communication – A Guide for Managing Media Relations

March 21, 2019

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Crisis (Critical Incident) Communication and the Media

The Police Department created standard operating procedures for crisis communication to assist incident commanders in the field during a critical incident. Research shows that with the fast-paced world of communication it is essential to begin communicating about a critical incident within minutes. The purpose of crisis communication is to inform, instruct, calm and direct the public to an avenue of factual and ongoing information, during and after a critical incident. The Police Department also understands that preparation and training are key to an effective response during a critical incident.

Definitions

- Crisis is defined as a difficult or dangerous situation that needs serious/immediate attention.
- Critical incident as defined by Training Bulletin #2016-07 – After Action Report and Procedures.
 - Any incident involving the use of lethal force by department personnel.
 - Any unplanned occurrence, event, or disaster which threatens the peace or safety of the community.
 - Any planned or unplanned event which requires the implementation of the law enforcement incident command structure or manage assets and response.
 - Any other incident which requires the use of significant department assets or which is deemed to be significant by the Chief of Police or incident commander for that incident.

Examples:

- Officer involved shooting.
- Officer injured during an incident.
- SWAT call where the suspect is dangerous and at large.
- Homicide where the suspect is dangerous and at large.
- Media generated events.

Step 1 - Assess

Answer these questions:

- Does the Police Department need the public to do something now to maintain their safety?
 - To stay clear, stay inside...
- Does the Police Department need the public's help now?
 - To get the suspect's information, incident detail, witness information...
- Is there a large amount of media coverage?
 - Is there misinformation that needs to be corrected or is the media asking the Police Department questions.

If the answer is no, then maybe there is no need for crisis communication. This does not mean we should not communicate, it is just not a critical element.

If the answer is yes, then go to the next step.

Step 2 – Monitor and Tweet

What to do:

1. Assign someone to monitor social media, especially Twitter.
 - a. Our Twitter handle is @carlsbadpolice.
 - i. Search for “Carlsbad”, “Carlsbad Police”, or other incident specific mentions.
 - b. Facebook is @CarlsbadPoliceDepartment.
 - c. Instagram is @carlsbadpolicedept.
 - d. Our Nextdoor account is City of Carlsbad.

2. As soon as users begin to exchange information on Twitter about the event, the Police Department should also be exchanging information.
 - a. Minutes matter.
 - b. It would be ideal to be the first to Tweet. It is generally not possible.
 - c. The Police Department should be part of the conversation in **20 minutes** or less.

3. Initial Tweets can be simple messages that just show we are there, in charge and that the Police Department is the place to get accurate and up-to-date information.
 - a. Until the initial media release - Tweets should come every few minutes to show people what we are doing and give instructions.
 - b. They should:
 - i. Tell the community what you need them to do (shelter in place, stay clear...).
 - ii. Tell the media what you need them to do (media staging at...).
 - iii. Tell the community and the media our plan (investigators are in route to...).

Examples are:

“Officers have contained the scene on Chestnut and investigators are on their way. Check here for the latest information.”

“Investigators are on scene. Request communities’ assistance in staying clear of the area or staying inside. More info to come.”

“Investigators have contained the scene to preserve the investigation. Media is asked to stage at Chestnut and Harding parking lot.”

Step 3 – Media Release

1. Put out a media release within **45 minutes** when possible.

The sooner the Police Department gets the information out, the sooner the media will give the investigators a break and wait for an update.

- a. Put out the facts of the case:
 - i. Who, what, where, when, how, why
 1. Required by the California Records Act:
 - a. Time, substance and location, nature of response, age and gender of victim, name, age, and city of residence of arrestee, factual circumstance surrounding the incident, general description of injuries (serious, minor, moderate injuries). Other

discussions of actual injuries are protected and are considered an invasion of privacy.

- i. We don't release information on juveniles, domestic violence/rape victims or generally suicides.
- ii. We do not release critical investigative details.
- b. What we have done (contained the scene, interview witnesses, made an arrest...).
- c. What we are going to do (team of investigators and evidence technicians....following the investigative leads...).
- d. Share policy if needed.

"Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act or HIPPA prevents the department from releasing ...what we can tell you is...."

"An employee's personnel file is protected by California Law...What we can tell you is...."

"In California, the Police Officer's Bill of Rights prevents the department from releasing...What we can tell you is...."

- e. What we need the public to do (stay clear, call with information, share information...).
- f. Use a quotes from the chief or incident commander showing empathy and thank those that have helped. Vet the quote before releasing it. We show empathy because, like the community we are human, and we too are affected.

"We are equally disturbed that...," "We are greatly saddened...," We share the publics dismay...,"

"We would like to thank the community member who called with pertinent information leading to the arrest..."

"We would like to thank the community for following instructions....being a good witness...providing pertinent information...."

"We would like to thank (other agency) for their assistance...."

- g. Send the release to the media.
- h. Post the media release to the police website (www.carlsbadca.gov/police).
- i. Post the release to Facebook and include the link to the City website.
- j. Tweet about the release and include a link to actual release. Examples:

"Homicide suspect arrested after shooting incident. More here (link)."

"Two officers seriously injured by armed robbery suspect. More here (link)."

"Dog shot after attacking officer serving a search warrant. Officer transported. More here (link)."

Step 4 – Media Talking Points

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Officer Involved Incident Talking Points

- The safety and welfare of our community is our top priority.
 - We understand how upsetting this incident is to the community. We are equally concerned and want to understand completely what occurred.
- We are taking this situation seriously and we are beginning a comprehensive investigation.
 - Please keep in mind, an investigation of this magnitude takes time.
 - We are dedicating resources to get an accounting of this incident.
 - Once the known facts have been examined, we will take appropriate action.
 - All Carlsbad police officers undergo extensive POST required training so they can be prepared for situations they might face in the field.
 - We will review the incident to determine whether the officers' actions were in compliance with the department's policies, procedures and training.
 - Our department's policies and procedures are reviewed and if warranted, changed to stay current with an ever-changing world.
- State law specifies what we can and cannot release about an ongoing officer-involved investigation.
 - What we can tell you in accordance with the law is, the incident is under investigation.
 - And we want to ensure the community that we will examine the facts in this case and take appropriate action.
- Our goal is to be transparent in our communications with the community and we will release as much information as possible in accordance with California law.
- We understand that the community wants information about this incident and the officers' involved.
 - We will abide by all laws relating to confidentiality and records and we will release information as required by the law.
 - While California law prevents us from releasing all the investigative facts in this matter, what we can tell you is:
 - We are conducting an investigation into this incident and we will take appropriate action once the known facts are examined.
 - As we go through this process we will release information as allowed by California law.
- The factual circumstances surrounding this incident are as follows (Government Code § 6254(f)(1)):
 - Who, what, where, when, how.
- We would like to thank the community for their patience and understanding during this time as a full accounting will take time.
- We would like to ask anyone with information on this incident to call

Officer Arrested Talking Points

- The safety and welfare of our community is our top priority.
 - We understand how upsetting this incident is to the community. We are equally concerned and want to understand completely what occurred.
- We hold our officers to a high standard and we take all allegation of wrongdoing very seriously.
 - Our professional standards unit investigates all claims of wrongdoing.
 - Our officers are also human beings and they will be held accountable for any wrongdoing. They are not above the law.
 - We thank the community for their patience and understanding as it will take time to thoroughly investigate this incident and find the facts.
 - While we investigate we appreciate the communities' efforts to wait for the facts in lieu of jumping to conclusions.
 - We will allow the criminal justice system to work in this case

Note – if the incident occurred while at work or at the police facility.

- Our policies, procedures and training are reviewed and if warranted, modified.
 - Our department's policies and procedures are reviewed and if warranted, changed to stay current with an ever-changing world.
- Our goal is to be transparent in our communications with the community and we will release as much information as possible in accordance with California law.
- California law specifies what we can and cannot release about an ongoing officer-involved investigation.
 - What we can tell you in accordance with the law is:
 - We are conducting an investigation into this incident.
 - Our investigation has lead us to believe that a crime may have been committed and the findings in this case have been turned over to the District Attorney's Office.
 - In collaboration with the District Attorney's Office, (officer name) has been arrested and charged with (insert charge).
 - The District Attorney's Office will now take the lead in this matter and move forward with the criminal case.
- The factual circumstances surrounding the arrest are as follows (Government Code § 6254(f)(1)):
 - Who, what, where, when, how.
- We would like to thank the community for their patience during this time as they understand a full accounting will take time.
- We would like to ask anyone with information on this incident to call

Shooting an Animal Talking Points

- The safety and welfare of our community and our officers is our top priority.
 - We understand how upsetting this incident is to the community. We are equally concerned and want to understand completely what occurred.
- We are beginning an investigation into today's incident.
 - A comprehensive investigation takes time.
 - We thank the community for their patience while we take the time necessary for a complete investigation.
 - We are dedicating resources to get a full accounting of this incident.
 - All Carlsbad police officers undergo extensive POST required training so they can be prepared for situations they might face in the field.
 - We will review the incident to determine whether the officers' actions were in compliance with the department's policies, procedures and training.
 - Information on how the department handles aggressive dogs can be found here http://www.carlsbadca.gov/services/depts/police/services/aggressive_or_dangerous_dogs.asp.
 - Our department's policies and procedures are reviewed and if warranted, changed to stay current with an ever-changing world.
- Our goal is to be transparent in our communications with the community.
- The factual circumstances surrounding this incident are as follows (Government Code § 6254(f)(1)):
 - Who, what, where, when, how.
- We would like to thank the community for their patience during this time as they understand a full accounting will take time.
- We would like to ask anyone with information on this incident to call ...