

**STANISLAUS CONSOLIDATED FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT
POLICIES & PROCEDURES**

ARTICLE: A-15
SECTION: Administrative Division
DATE: 6/12/2013
SUPERSEDES: New
TITLE: Release of Information

BACKGROUND

Stanislaus Consolidated Fire Protection District (District) is dedicated to providing effective public education and professional service to our community. The District will keep the community informed of our efforts and activities by assisting and cooperating with the news media.

PURPOSE

This policy provides guidelines for media releases and media access to scenes of disasters, emergencies and other Stanislaus Consolidated Fire Protection District related activities.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all District employees, temporary employees, interns, volunteers, vendors, consultants, contractors performing business on behalf of the District, or any other individuals who are contractually obligated to follow the District's policies. It applies to the release of media information, media access to scenes of disasters, emergencies and other fire related activities.

POLICY

The ultimate authority and responsibility for the release of information to the media shall remain with the Stanislaus Consolidated Fire Chief, however, in situations not warranting immediate notification to the Fire Chief and in situations where the Fire Chief has given prior approval; The Deputy Chief, Battalion Chief or designated Public Information Officer may prepare and release information to the media in accordance with this policy and the applicable law.

PROCEDURES

MEDIA ACCESS

Authorized and bona fide members of the media shall be provided access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations and other emergency incidents. However, all are subject to the following conditions (Penal Code §409.5)

- a. The media representative shall produce valid press credentials that shall be prominently displayed at all times while in areas otherwise closed to the public. Media is to include school and college papers, and internet outlets.
- b. Media representatives may be prevented from entering a restricted area when their presence interferes with:
 - Emergency operations or impacts the safety of emergency service workers or citizens.
 - Crime scene investigations.
 - Any military or Federal area, with the exception of US Forest Service property.
- c. No member of this District shall be subject to media visits or interviews without the consent of the involved employee (Government Code § 3303(e)).

Media representatives may be prohibited from entering private property unless permission is given by the property owner.

In situations where media access would reasonable appear to interfere with emergency operations and/or criminal investigation, every reasonable effort should be made to provide media representatives with access to a media information post at the nearest location that will not interfere with such activities.

MEDIA REQUEST

Any media request for information or access to the District shall be referred to a Chief Officer or the designated Public Information Officer. Prior to releasing any information to the media, employees shall consider the following:

- a. **At no time shall any employee of SCFPD make any comment or release any official information to the media without prior approval.**
- b. Information release will include, but not be limited to: pictures, video, audio, or any other type of media that may be transferred, transmitted, traded, printed or displayed, including but not limed to the following types of equipment: cameras, video cameras, helmet cams, cell phone cams, voice recorders, etc.
- c. Social Media websites such as Twitter, Facebook, Myspace, YouTube, etc are public domain and are to be considered to have the same restrictions as any other type of media information posting or release.

- d. In situations involving multiple emergency response agencies, every effort should be made to coordinate any media release(s) with the Incident IC. In some cases, a Joint Information Center (JIC) should be considered.
- e. **Under no circumstance will any member of SCFPD make any comment(s) to the media regarding any emergency incident; not involving SCFPD, without the prior approval of the District Fire Chief or his/her designated representative.**

The following list is a suggestion as to the type of information to gather for release:

- a. Date, time and incident number
- b. Street address with appropriate block location
- c. Description of the incident: who, what, when, where, how. **(victims names WILL NOT be given out)**
- d. Property damage – A reasonable estimate of property destroyed by fire. However, a more important aspect is the amount of property saved by fire crews.
- e. Number of injured persons – May include extent of injuries, i.e., minor, moderate, serious, critical. **(Specific details of injuries shall not be released.)**
- f. Number of deaths – Names of the deceased WILL NOT be released by SCFPD; inquiries about the identity of the deceased will be referred to the agency responsible for the body, usually the Sheriff/Coroner. The policy of the Sheriff/Coroner is to not release the name of the deceased until the next of kin has been notified.
- g. Cause – Unless cause has been determined, do not give an opinion. State that the cause is under investigation, undetermined or incendiary.

With the increase of digital media the SCFPD Social Media Policy shall apply.

REFERENCES

1. All current policies can be found on the District's web site: www.scfpd.us by logging in.
2. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPPA)
3. District Policy #C-32 Public Information Officer

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X
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