

1004.07

## News Media Standard Operating Procedure



*This procedure is for internal use only and does not enlarge an employee's civil liability in any way. The procedure should not be construed as creating a higher duty of care, in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party civil claims against employees. A violation of this procedure, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by this department for non-judicial administrative action in accordance with the laws governing employee discipline.*

**Related Policies:**

**Applicable HI Statutes:**

### I. PURPOSE

This standard operating procedure addresses media rights and responsibilities, personal and professional behavior, using print and broadcast media (interviews, briefings, news releases, media events, advertising, etc.).

It is the policy of the Hawai'i Fire Department to establish and maintain a positive working relationship with the news media.

This directive will establish a standard operating procedure to provide the media with information normally requested from the Fire Department on emergency incidents, to monitor the movements of media personnel for safety reasons, and to establish an operating framework for an Information Sector that will effectively integrate into the overall incident management system.”

### II. APPLICABILITY

This Policy is applicable to all personnel of the Hawai'i Fire Department.

### III. PROCEDURES

1. Media Rights and Responsibilities: Every effort should be made to provide accurate information. Usually, while gathering information, there will be inquiries from reporters. Provide the information you have at that point and emphasize that this information is preliminary. If it gets to the point that questions from reporters are keeping you from gathering information, use these alternatives:
  - a. Tell the reporters to gather in one place and that you will return shortly with more information.
  - b. Request additional manpower from Command to assist in gathering information and remain with the reporters.
  - c. Tell the reporters to go ahead and get pictures and film footage without interfering with incident operations while you are gathering information. Journalists will not be assigned to a sector and will be required to remain outside the incident perimeter. Make sure and point out the hazard zone. Arrange to meet with them shortly and give them any additional or updated information.
  - d. If they have deadlines to meet, get a phone number(s) where they can be reached and phone them as soon as possible.
  - e. Do not use the names of deceased or seriously injured persons in your interview.
  - f. Do not speculate as to the cause of a fire or incident.



2. **Incident Command:** The Incident Commander will be responsible for the assignment of an Information Sector on the fireground or any significant incident. As soon as practical, after basic rescue and fire operations are extended, the Command will establish an Information Sector. The establishment of this sector will relieve the Command of the responsibility of dealing directly with the media during critical Command stages and provide standard information the media will require to accurately report the emergency. The Public Information Officer (PIO) will report to Command, upon arrival, and establish an Information Sector if not already established.

NOTE: If a fire company or other fire department member has been assigned Information Sector responsibilities the PIO will report to the sector location, receive a briefing from the sector officer, and assist as needed. The PIO may assume sector responsibilities at his/her discretion.

3. **Public Information Sector:** Once the Public Information Sector is established, the following will be incorporated into the operation:
- a. Radio designation will be "Public Information Sector."
  - b. Individuals assigned to perform this sector function should consider the following general guidelines: Basic Information:
    - i. Timely response
    - ii. Number of units and personnel on-scene
    - iii. Human interest or safety information
  - c. If possible, add anything to the basic information that will enhance the story; such information might include:
    - i. Highly skilled and trained professionals (high rise, technical rescue, etc.)
    - ii. An extremely hazardous situation
    - iii. A person or company that did an outstanding job.
    - iv. A rescue scenario
    - v. Projected duration of incident
      - This information will assist the reporters in their coverage of the incident and enhance the quality and accuracy of their stories.
      - When possible, an interview with the company officer or crewmember is encouraged. Don't be afraid to talk to reporters. They will report the facts you give them.
  - d. The individual or company assigned to the Information Sector may be required to escort the media on a tour of the fire damage area following knockdown. This must be cleared with Command and coordinated with operating sectors prior to entering the area.
  - e. The Information Sector will be responsible for ensuring that all media personnel wear proper protective clothing on the fireground or any other area when needed.
  - f. Each Sector Officer is responsible for the safety of media personnel in the area. If media personnel create a safety problem, or hinder operations, they will be requested to move.



4. Personnel Dealing with the Media: Engaging with the media, while an essential aspect of public communication for the department, carries inherent dangers that must be approached with caution. One of the primary risks lies in the potential misinterpretation or misrepresentation of one's words or intentions. Media outlets often condense complex statements or edit interviews, which can distort the intended message or context, leading to misunderstandings or unintended consequences. Furthermore, discussing sensitive or confidential information with the media can jeopardize security, privacy, or legal matters.

Additionally, media interviews can be emotionally charged, leading to impulsive or ill-considered remarks that may come back to haunt the speaker. Therefore, it's crucial for individuals to approach media interactions with a thoughtful and strategic mindset, being mindful of the potential pitfalls and ensuring that their messages align with their intended objectives while protecting their interests and credibility.

- a. Personnel will ensure their participation in an interview will not negatively impact emergency operations or distract from mission accomplishment.
- b. Personnel will be presentable and in attire commensurate with the activity they are representing.
- c. Personnel talking with the media shall share only facts. There shall be no assumptions or release of information that is not verifiable. Caution shall additionally be taken in reference to patients, fatalities or other information that may lead to undue stress.
- d. It is ok to say, "I don't know." Don't guess or embellish.
- e. Don't comment on sections or areas outside of your capacity.
- f. Remember that you are representing the Department. Be professional and avoid any derogatory remarks.