



SOUTH LYON FIRE DEPARTMENT

Manual of Procedures 101

MEDIA RELATIONS

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Approved: Chief Mike Kennedy

I. PURPOSE

The South Lyon Fire Department seeks to inform its residents, businesses and visitors by engaging in a proactive communications program. This program recognizes that one of the most effective and quickest ways to communicate with our community is by working in partnership with the news media.

II. MEDIA INQUIRIES

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

The fire chief is responsible for SLFD's media relations. All SLFD employees shall notify the fire chief about media inquiries. Because the media often works on tight deadlines, it is important that all requests are responded as soon as possible. Specific guidelines for responding to media requests follow below.

Unless otherwise authorized, SLFD's spokespersons are:

- City Manager
- City Attorney
- Fire Chief
- Deputy Fire Chief
- Police Chief

Any media inquiries received by anyone else shall be referred immediately to the fire chief. An appropriate response to the media would be, "I am sorry I do not have the full information regarding that issue. I will give your request to the fire chief, who will respond to you as soon as he/she is available." Please obtain the reporter's name, phone number, topic of story and deadline, and contact the fire chief as soon as possible.

III. 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 SLFD's official policy. Therefore, SLFD employees who write letters to the editor of any newspaper may not use official SLFD stationary.



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If an employee chooses to identify himself or herself as a SLFD 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 talk show, or is interviewed for a radio or television program unless the employee has approval to be officially representing SLFD. Employees who are representing SLFD in any of the above formats must identify themselves as an official spokesperson for SLFD and have the approval to represent SLFD through the fire chief.

IV. GUIDELINES FOR INTERACTION WITH THE MEDIA

Under certain situations, the fire chief may authorize the incident commander or other staff to make statements to the media. Interviews with company officers and operating crew members can be a good way to get fire department information into the public's view.

Here are some things to think about should you be picked for an interview.

- First of all, relax and be yourself. Understand that you know more about your job than the reporter or the public. Be prepared to share educational information based on your present incident that could save lives or property or make your job easier, such as "smoke detectors save lives" or "constant supervision prevents drowning." Give pertinent information and facts, do not speculate or give personal opinions.
- Be aware that traffic accidents have two parts: cause and effect. The cause will be determined by a police department investigation and is not ours to speculate. The effect of what happened, injuries, damaged, etc., is within our jurisdiction and we can report it. Accidents present an opportunity to educate the public on seatbelt use.
- Whenever discussing events with the media, use words and phrases that do not pin you or the department down unless you are absolutely sure of what you are saying. Helpful words and phrases are: "possibly," "allegedly," "under investigation," "made a statement" (do not say "confessed"), "witness said," etc. Also, use the word "accelerant" instead of flammable or combustible liquid, gasoline, kerosene, etc. Do not name suspects or motives. Talk to investigators for dollar loss, cause, and other pertinent information.

Here are some tips for a successful television interview.

- Sit or stand still while being interviewed. Look the reporter in the eye, not at the camera or the photographer. Do not wear sunglasses, they make you look evasive. If a question is unclear, ask the reporter to repeat or explain it.



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- Think before you speak, pauses can be edited out of the tape. Say what you mean to say. If you do not know the answer, say so. If you make a mistake, correct it. Be brief. Television is looking for a 10-15 second "sound bite" that can be used to add to the impact of the story.
- Do not accept facts or figures quoted by the reporter if you are not sure they are reliable. Never go "off the record." If you do not want to see something in print or on TV, do not say it. Do not use fire department jargon. The public will not understand it and the media will not use it. State the most important facts at the beginning. Do not argue with a reporter. If a reporter wants information you cannot release, do not evade and do not say "no comment" (it sounds incriminating). Simply state that you cannot release the information, and explain why.
- Welcome the reporter and the reporter's questions. Take the attitude that the reporter represents the public, you want the public to know your story. Be honest and as straight forward as possible in your answers.

Approved by
/s/ Chief Mike Kennedy