

*Together Better Policing*

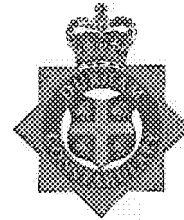
# Media Guide



This guide has been compiled to help all officers and staff of Durham Constabulary in their dealings with members of the media. It is impossible to cover every scenario, but the guidance is designed to cover most operational situations.

Previous force policy stated only officers of sergeant and above were authorised to speak to the media without reference to supervision. However, over the years it has become common practice for constables to do so as well, provided they are speaking on issues or cases which are within their remit. If there is any uncertainty about the subject matter or a reporter's line of questioning, seek advice from supervision or from the press and public relations office.

The force has long practised openness with the public - and that, of course includes the media. We continue to be committed to holding back "only what we must."



*Altogether Better Policing*

Speaking to the media means, in the eyes of viewers and readers and the ears of listeners, that you become the spokesperson for the force. Don't be tempted to talk outside your sphere of responsibility, knowledge or experience. But do feel confident to talk about subjects you are comfortable with.

There are many advantages in talking to the media but some members of staff remain reluctant to take the initiative. Anyone needing advice should be aware the press office is available during normal working hours to offer guidance. If the need is urgent we can be contacted outside these times via supervision in the communications centres.

# Press/Media Relations Office

Every police organisation in the UK has a dedicated media relations department providing a professional service to its members of staff and the media.

In some cases the department is known by the traditional 'press office' or 'press and public relations' title - but there is a wide variety of other terms used which broadly describe the same function. These include corporate communications, media services, media relations and marketing. However, for reasons of simplicity the term used mainly in this guide is 'press office'.

Talking openly and regularly to all sections of the media allows us to promote the good work of Durham Constabulary.

And the constant demand for information about the work of the force generates thousands of calls to and from the office every year. News updates about crimes or other incidents are provided on a regular basis through the force 'Voicebank' (a recorded message service), by email and through the news pages of the force website.

We also promote initiatives and other developments within the force, organise filming opportunities, photo-calls and interviews with members of staff.

Other responsibilities include producing the force newspaper, 'Copper Plate'; providing input to various training courses and voiceovers for in-house video productions; and liaising with external agencies such as the probation, health and prison services, local authorities, Durham University and Government bodies e.g. Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

One of the department's main functions is to protect the force from media excesses, especially when damage limitation measures are required. It is vital that when drawing up a strategy, media officers are given the fullest information possible.

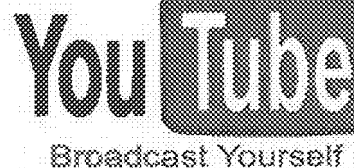


# Firearms Incidents

If an authorised firearms officer (AFO) is involved in wounding or fatally injuring a member of the public, the press office should be contacted as a matter of urgency. Any statements issued will almost certainly have been sanctioned both by a member of the executive and the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC).

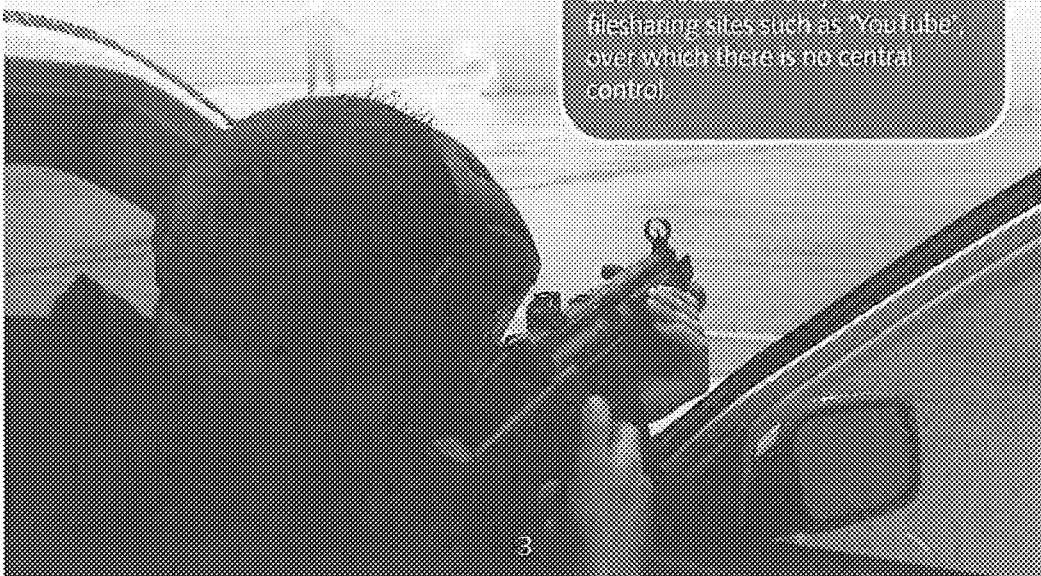
In such incidents the IPCC will almost always conduct an investigation and take the lead in media handling of the case. Although the force will therefore be restricted in what it can say, there will be regular dialogue with the IPCC media office which often provides the opportunity to clarify certain points or to correct any errors in previous media reports.

Amateur video footage of a shooting incident may exist, especially when it follows a protracted stand-off. If this is handed to the media it would be usual practice for news editors to inform the force so that officers and/or relatives of the injured/deceased could be warned before screening.



**You Tube**  
Broadcast Yourself

However, these days there is an equal likelihood such material may also be loaded directly onto filesharing sites such as 'YouTube', over which there is no central control.



## Naming Police Victims

In the interests of openness it is force policy to usually identify by name an officer injured on duty, if the incident is serious enough to generate media interest. Their normal place of work would also be given. The press office would release details only after contacting supervision to ensure relatives were aware.

In some cases there may be requests for more details, or perhaps a picture of the officer recovering at home or in their hospital bed. Such requests would be co-ordinated by the press office and only agreed with the permission of the officer concerned.

### Officers' photographs

When the media ask for an officer's photo, whether in connection with an injury on duty or any other relevant matter, care is taken to ensure images of those engaged in covert or similar police work are not released. Contrary to popular belief, there is no obligation on the media to disguise the faces of firearms officers if they have been photographed or filmed during a police operation – however, media outlets often decide to do so voluntarily.

## Offbeat Or Human Interest Stories

Opportunities sometimes arise to release information about 'offbeat' or 'human interest' stories which either present the force in a good light or illustrate the varied nature of modern policing.

Often these stories can generate a surprising amount of media interest, along with accompanying requests for interviews or pictures. The co-operation of any members of the public directly involved would generally be sought, in cases where there is an element of embarrassment their personal details would be withheld.

If you need any guidance on the news merits of such a story, contact the media office by phone or email.



# Releasing Details After Arrest

The names of people under arrest would only be disclosed under exceptional circumstances, although less precise details - such as "a 25-year-old local man" or "a 63-year-old Durham City man" may be applied.

However, in serious cases or those in which there is considerable public interest, it is common practice to disclose the name, age, address (but not house number) and perhaps occupation of an accused adult **once they have been charged and are imminently due before a court.** The same might be done when a person has been bailed and charged to appear before a court at a later date - but in both instances this would usually be done only after liaison with the officer in the case.

*NB - legal restrictions means juveniles (i.e. those under 18) cannot be identified by name.*

When someone agrees to accept a caution their personal details would not routinely be released, although it might be possible to confirm a "man" or a "woman" has been cautioned for an offence which has generated media interest.

Also, where breath tests are administered and media enquiries follow, it would be unusual to divulge a name until or unless a person has been charged. Where speeding or fixed penalty offences are involved we should not routinely confirm names - although this may be difficult to sustain in certain cases e.g. the arrest of a 'celebrity' where the media already know or suspect the identity of the person involved.

In such cases if a reporter asks the police to confirm a name there is no point in denying it - provided the information is correct. However, any official statement should still refer to the suspect only in the vague terms suggested above.

The Sexual Offenders (Amendment) Act of 1992 prohibits the identification of a victim of a sex crime during that person's lifetime. This can only be lifted by order of a court or in writing by the victim.

The Contempt of Court Act, 1981 places responsibility on the media not to publish or broadcast anything which might seriously prejudice the fair trial of any individual. This applies after arrest or service of summons and it is the responsibility of the media to comply with the contempt law. It is up to the courts to sanction those who breach this law.

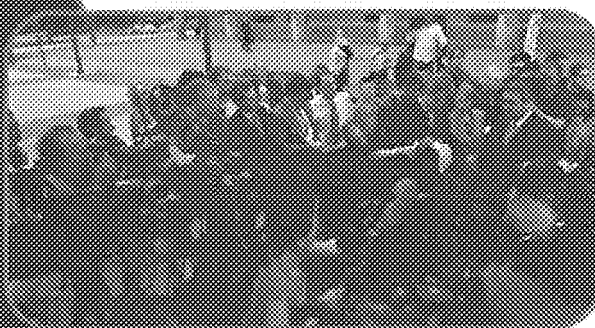
# Naming Victims

Publicly identifying victims of crime, along with survivors of accidents and other incidents (including house fires, river rescues, industrial accidents etc) is subject to restrictions imposed by the Data Protection Act as well as the European Convention on Human Rights.

It is force policy that personal details of survivors would not normally be disclosed unless they, or close relatives give their approval. However, this does not prohibit the release of less specific information such as the ages of the person(s) involved and the town or city they are from.

The information commissioner has confirmed that in certain cases an "officer of appropriate rank" (in this force, an inspector or above) can release details without seeking permission. This may be needed if, for example, police are trying to trace the movements of an individual before they became the victim of a serious crime.

The deaths of people who are victims of crime, road collisions or other such incidents are a matter of public record and their details will be released to the media;



relatives cannot influence this and officers should not, on any account, make promises otherwise.

If details are to be withheld for an appreciable length of time – for example, it may be days before formal identification can be done on a badly burned body - it might be necessary to explain the reasons for the delay. But in many such cases reporters will often have obtained the name of the deceased through their own enquiries, either through neighbours or other members of the family.

The release of pictures and information concerning victims is often done via the appointed Family Liaison Officer (FLO). The FLO can also play a vital part in helping arrange a suitable tribute to the deceased, which can then be released to the media. But in the last few years the explosion in the use of social networking sites means the media can often obtain details, including pictures, long before any official release is made via the police.



## Requests for Statistics & Freedom Of Information

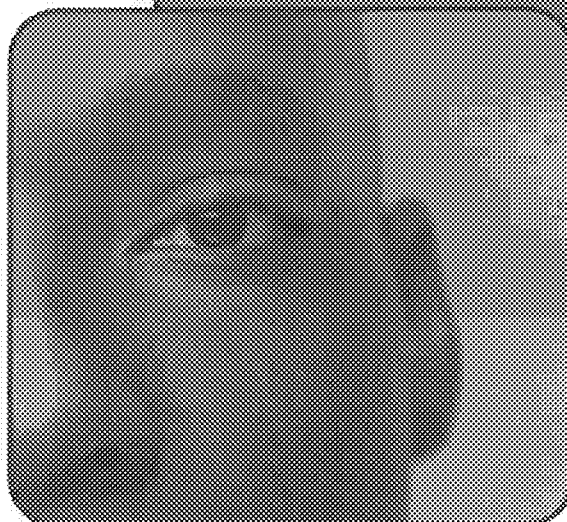
Requests for crime figures or other statistics may give the force the chance to highlight successes or explain what action is being taken to deal with a specific problem. Usually such requests are made through the press office, but sometimes figures are released through local police/public meetings at which reporters may be present.

Crime figures are also updated regularly on the force website, as are details of recent Freedom of Information (Foi) queries and replies. Foi is used by many sections of the media to obtain statistics on a wide range of subjects; requests for comments on Foi matters are generally handled by the press office.

## Racial Incidents

Under the Race Relations Act Durham Constabulary seeks to ensure everything the force does eliminates racial discrimination, promotes equality of opportunity and promotes good race relations between different racial groups.

Where an incident or crime is perceived to have a racist element it would be safe to confirm to the media the police are treating it as just that – a racist incident. However, any attempt to imply ‘racial motivation’ or ‘racial aggravation’ should be firmly rebutted until the investigating officer has sufficient evidence to support such claims.





## Public Disorder

Major disturbances often generate press interest, especially when those involved leave a trail of damage; a number of police officers are injured; or other members of the emergency services are caught up in turmoil or violence.

Details of the numbers of people involved, the general nature of charges (if brought) and details of when and where the accused will appear before a court can safely be given, preferably by the officer in charge. Avoid speculating on the political leanings of any group.

## Complaints Against Police

Questions about complaints or disciplinary matters

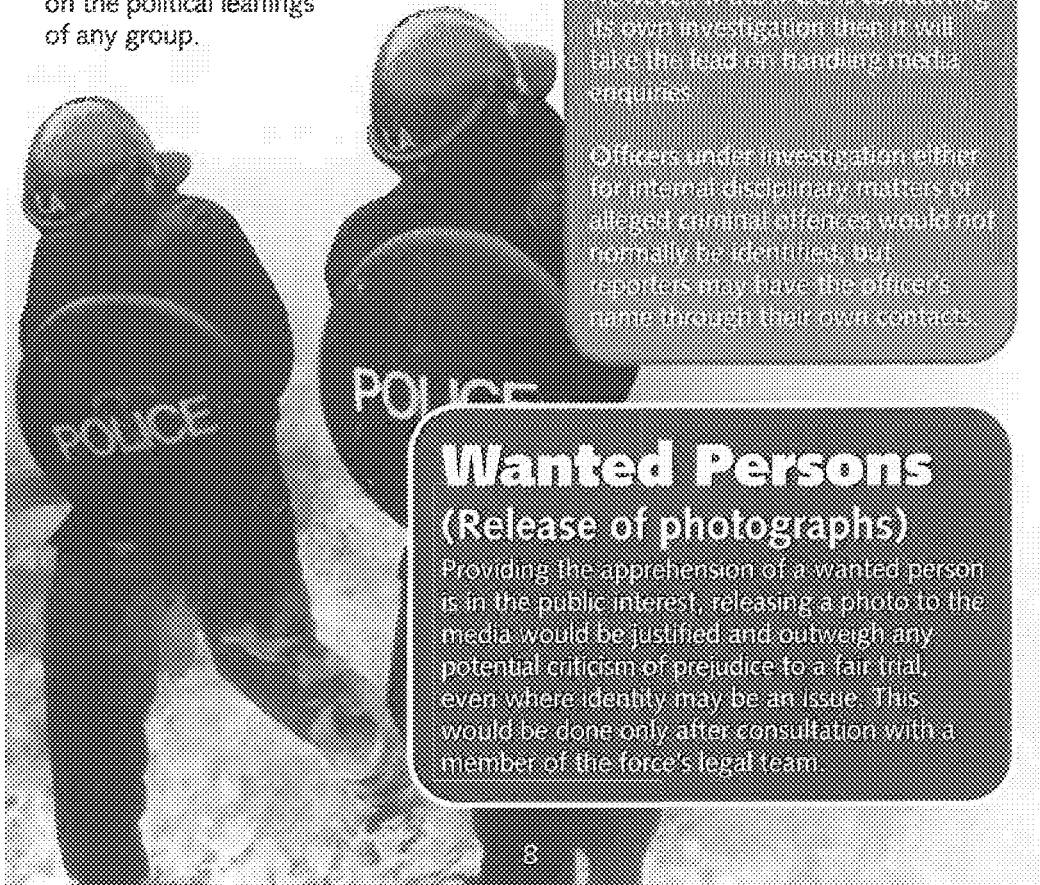


should be directed to the press office. Any replies will ultimately be sanctioned by a senior member of the professional standards department and in some cases by the IPCC. However, if the IPCC is conducting its own investigation then it will take the lead on handling media enquiries.

Officers under investigation either for internal disciplinary matters or alleged criminal offences would not normally be identified, but reporters may have the officer's name through their own contacts.

## Wanted Persons (Release of photographs)

Providing the apprehension of a wanted person is in the public interest, releasing a photo to the media would be justified and outweigh any potential criticism of prejudice to a fair trial, even where identity may be an issue. This would be done only after consultation with a member of the force's legal team.

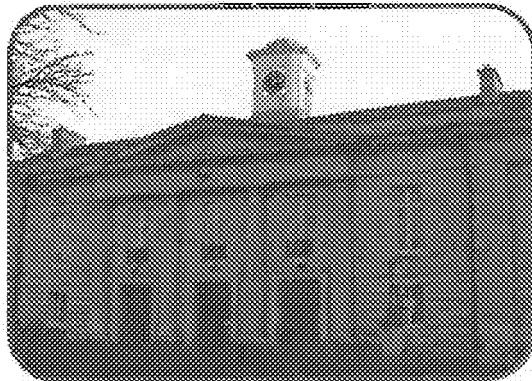


## Pre-Trial Briefings

Major investigations or crimes of significant public interest can generate requests for pre-trial briefings from senior officers directly involved in the case.

Each is considered on its merits and such briefings are normally conducted on the strict understanding the contents are not to be used until the end of court proceedings. The fact a briefing took place may also need to be disclosed to the defence.

There may be other cases where it would be appropriate for the press office to prepare background statements and/or audio-visual material to help the media which would be issued at the end of court proceedings. The Crown Prosecution Service may also choose to release material used at court and put forward their own officials for interview or comment.



## Sex / Violent Offenders

The management of the disclosure of information about sex offenders is a complex process, involving many agencies who share a common aim of protecting the public.

Any decision to publicly identify a registered sex offender, or potentially violent individual would only take place after careful deliberation by the local Public Protection Unit, which comprises representatives of the police and probation services. Meetings are regularly held under the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) to manage the release of such offenders back into the community after serving a custodial sentence.

In the event of media enquiries about sex offenders living at a specified address, an agreed regional protocol exists between the media and police which can dramatically influence the way stories will be published or broadcast. All such enquiries should be referred to the press office as a matter of urgency.

## Release of Photographs After Conviction

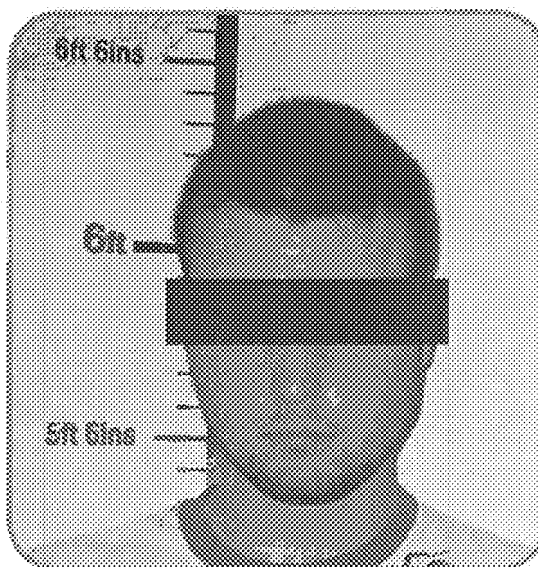
Once someone has been convicted at court there is no legal reason why their photograph cannot be released to the media, as the picture is police property.

Photos would normally be issued only in the event of a substantial jail term, as determined by the head of CID or if there was a crime prevention or public safety reason for doing so.

But in cases where the offence is especially noteworthy or has generated an unusual level of media or public interest, there may be an argument for the release of a photo whatever the level of punishment handed down by the court.

All such requests would be put to the head of CID or a senior investigating officer.

Requests for pictures of those issued with Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) are considered on the merits of each case. Because ASBOs are classed as civil proceedings the normal restrictions on identifying juveniles do not apply – unless the court specifically orders otherwise.



Home Office guidance states publicity for ASBOs 'should be the norm not the exception'. In some cases local publicity, by way of posters, neighbourhood newsletters or leaflet drops might be considered more appropriate than the mass media. However, publicity needs to be timely to ensure communities are aware of the order and are best placed to help enforce its terms.

## Terrorist / Bomb Attacks

Tight control is exercised over information released following any terrorist or suspected terrorist attack. Precise language needs to be used when releasing details and would normally follow close liaison with specialists in the Metropolitan Police.



Details of any incident, especially in the early stages should be confined to:

- Confirmation there has been an incident / explosion
- A particular area has been sealed off or evacuated and where evacuees have been directed to
- Reassurance the police and other emergency services have the situation under control
- Confirm if there have been casualties but NOT numbers or nature of injuries
- Details of hospitals receiving casualties
- Casualty bureau telephone number
- Traffic diversion, road closures

## Sudden Deaths

Where no crime is believed to have taken place the force would not normally volunteer details of a sudden death, especially if it has occurred in a private location. There are exceptions and police might initiate a release of information (after relatives have been informed) if a body is found in a public place and disclosure would allay fears and spike rumours.

If responding to media enquiries about a sudden death, don't speculate as to the background or the cause of death - these are matters which could ultimately be the subject of an inquiry by the coroner. But there is no reason why factual details should not be confirmed eg "the body of a 29-year-old local man was found hanging from a tree in Skerne Park yesterday evening, there are no suspicious circumstances."

## News Blackouts

Agreed national procedures are in place between the police and all sections of the media relating to kidnapping incidents where there is genuine reason to believe life may be at risk. These procedures ensure a temporary news blackout until the end of the incident and would only be instigated following a formal request from a member of the executive.

## Explosions and Unexploded Devices

At the scene of an explosion where crime appears to have been ruled out, care should be taken in suggesting a possible cause. The media will not be slow to spot gas, electricity or other utility vehicles in the area which will open up obvious lines of speculation. It is for those organisations to comment on the cause after they have completed their investigations.

On occasions members of the public discover unexploded wartime devices on the beach, in their garden or at some other location. The activity which follows – usually involving Army bomb disposal experts being called to the scene – may generate media interest, and it would be good practice to release relevant details, along with any appropriate safety message.

## Escapes from Prisons and Young Offender Institutions

In the unusual event of a prisoner escaping from jail or a young offenders' facility it would be normal to release details, usually following consultation with the media department of the prison service.

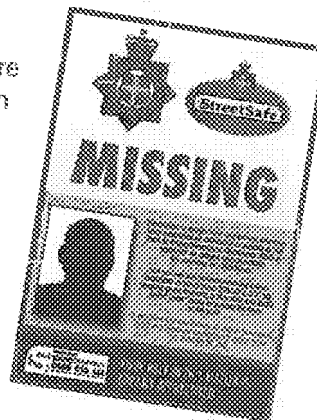
Photographs of the escapee(s) would be issued by the force; photos of juveniles would not normally be released unless there is an overriding reason, for example they pose a danger to the public. In such cases the press office would consult a member of the force legal team.

## Escapes From Police or Court Custody

Confirmation of escape from custody would be given in response to enquiries initiated by the media. Publicity would obviously be sought if the escapee was considered a danger to the public or themselves, or if the circumstances were unusual – for instance someone is injured in the course of the escape bid. If appropriate a photo of the wanted person may be released, with the approval of a member of the force legal team and/or the CPs.

## Missing Persons

When children or adults go missing from home and there is a genuine concern they may be at risk, there is an obvious case for releasing details to the media. This system should be used cautiously, as very often the missing person will turn up before appeals can be broadcast or printed.

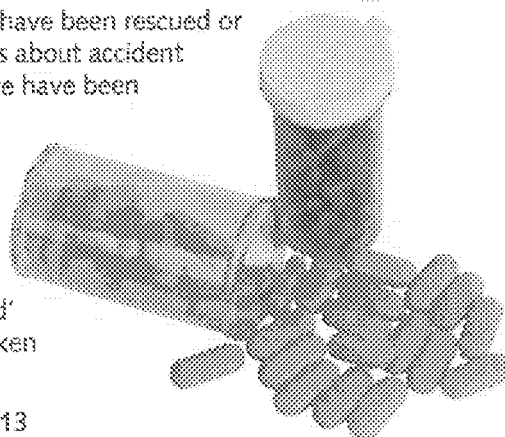


Approval for a press release should always have been obtained from a senior officer (inspector or above).

When the person concerned is found or returns of their own accord, the press office (or north comms centre supervision out of normal office hours) **MUST** be informed as soon as possible so the alert can be cancelled.

## Rescues Or Attempted Rescues

Restrictions apply in naming people who have been rescued or the rescuers themselves (see earlier details about accident victims). However, if members of the force have been involved then there is an obvious opportunity to highlight their bravery or skill. In cases where suicide is attempted and a rescue has taken place, care should be taken in the way details are released. Any statement might need to say the victim 'fell' rather than 'jumped' or was 'taken ill' as opposed to having taken 'an overdose'.



## Incidents Involving The Fire Service

County Durham and Darlington Fire & Rescue routinely issue details to the media of fires, road collisions and other incidents their crews have been called to attend. This can often lead to further enquiries being made to the force as reporters seek additional details.

In cases where a fire is thought to have been started deliberately, it should not be described as 'arson' until confirmed as such. But there is a lot to be gained by an early media appeal for witnesses, regardless of whether the cause of the blaze has yet been established.



## Hoax Calls

Publicity can encourage trivial calls and the media recognise and accept this. They may ask questions if town centres are brought to a standstill or buildings evacuated, however they may be persuaded not to broadcast or publish details if the call turns out to be a hoax. The argument may be harder to sustain when a suspect package turns out to be harmless but has caused major disruption.



## Fraud And Economic Crime

Putting the public on their guard about the activities of conmen, unwanted doorstep callers and computer criminals has obvious merit. The media office and HQ-based economic crime unit can assist with publicity in this regard and offer suitable warnings to prevent others becoming victims.

## Police-Held Footage

Requests for the release of police video footage, whether from the air support unit, traffic cars or body-worn cameras are treated on their merits and would normally be sanctioned by a senior officer in the appropriate department.

On occasions the reverse situation applies and officers may ask for material transmitted by television stations which could assist their investigations. Such requests should be handled by the media office and/or a member of the legal services team.



The media also sometimes ask for cctv images recorded on private security cameras (for example, at a commercial burglary). These images can be a powerful tool in terms of reinforcing appeals for information, although care would need to be taken to ensure the material released did not disclose details vital to the investigation.

## Taking The Media On Operations

Most forces invite the local media from time to time on pre-planned operations such as drugs raids, in the interests of openness and informing the public.

If members of the media accompany police on operations an indemnity form (available from the press office) must be completed beforehand.

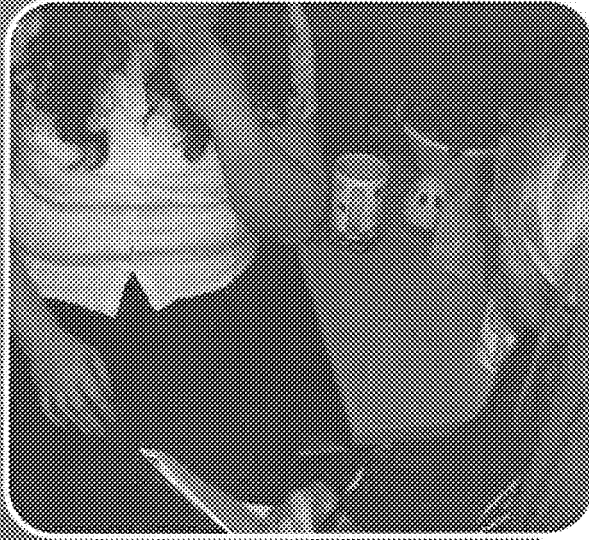
Agreement should also be reached in advance regarding which, if any, officers should not be photographed or filmed for operational reasons.





## Deaths Following Police Contact

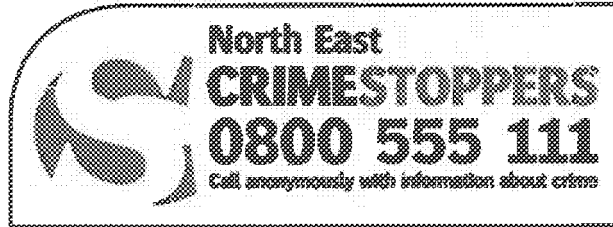
The lead role in investigations is often taken by the Independent Police Complaints Commission, and the press office would liaise with the IPCC press office before releasing any information.



## Rewards

There is nothing to stop members of the public offering a reward for the return of valuable property, but care should be

taken in the phrasing of any such offer -- eg the use of the term 'no questions asked' is strictly forbidden. In such cases it could also be an opportunity for the police to remind the public that cash rewards can be made via Crimestoppers (0800 555 111).



# The Seven Commandments

## Do...

1. Take a positive attitude with the media
2. Ask for ID if you are unsure who you are talking to
3. Alert the press office if you are under genuine media pressure or need advice
4. Be honest - if you can't answer, say why
5. Remember you could be speaking on behalf of the force, even if you are not the appointed spokesperson
6. At major incidents know where the media centre is and what is available
7. Make yourself the best source of information

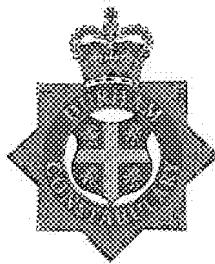
## Don't...

1. Stop a tv crew or photographer from taking pictures. Never put your hand in front of a lens - it looks like you're trying to hide something
2. Lie, or give false information
3. Be afraid to say "I don't know" - But do your best to get the answers
4. Say 'no comment' - there is almost always something constructive to say, even if you don't want to get into details
5. Give 'off the record' information unless you are sure you can trust the reporter concerned
6. Give special or exclusive treatment to anyone
7. Pass the buck. Journalists don't go away, they'll simply look elsewhere for the information they need

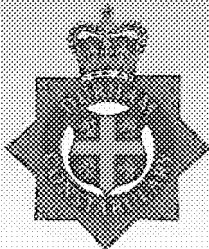
# TV and Radio Interviews

Most broadcast interviews tend to be recorded rather than 'live' and in the case of radio, are often conducted down the phone. Whatever the medium, an effective interview needs a clear objective, good preparation and positive presentation.

1. Define objectives and establish interview format
2. Establish 'on air' time, especially for live interviews
3. Work out your 'must' or 'bullet' points in advance; use the questions to make them
4. Present a reasonable image and discuss the topic(s)
5. Don't get drawn into an argument, but don't allow yourself to be browbeaten. Tell the truth, be confident, be sincere
6. Avoid police jargon – members of the public don't know and don't care what ACPO, RTC and FLO stand for. Talk of 'people', not 'persons', 'houses' not 'domestic dwellings'; 'caught' not 'apprehended'
7. Look at the interviewer (tv) and ignore the camera. Listen for your cue (radio) and remember you may have limited time to get your points across



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**Media Guide**

Produced by HQ Press & Public Relations Office

