

677 PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

PURPOSE:

This policy will supply a guideline to provide members of the news media with information normally requested concerning emergency & non-emergency incidents involving the Florence Township Fire Department.

SCOPE:

All emergency & non-emergency incidents involving the Florence Township Fire Department.

GENERAL:

It is important that relationships with the press & the public always present the emergency services organization as an honest & professional organization. Personnel should be encouraged to extend themselves & their organization to the extent possible under the conditions at hand & to cooperate fully with the press. When distributing statements to the press, all members should be reminded that they are held in high regard by the public & as such should limit their statements to the facts concerning the event & limit their expressions of opinions to those which reflect positively on the organization and its personnel.

PROCEDURE:

EMERGENCY INCIDENTS:

The incident commander will be responsible for the management of public information at the emergency scene, unless that responsibility has been delegated to a public information officer (PIO). All personnel on the emergency scene should be courteous & helpful to members of the press at all times. When members of the press are in a dangerous or posted area in which they may hamper an operation, or become a hazard to themselves or emergency personnel, they shall be requested to leave the area in a polite but firm manner. Police assistance should be requested if necessary.

Incident commanders or the person designated as the PIO should limit their comments to the press to those facts that deal specifically with the nature of the incident, i.e. time of alarm, apparatus utilization, assistance requested, etc.

PERSONAL OPINION ABOUT THE INCIDENT SHOULD NOT BE PART OF THE OFFICIAL COMMENTS.

The cause/origin of a fire, names & addresses of fatalities, cause of an accident, building owners, estimate of damage & other such items that require investigation or notification for legal purposes should NEVER be released as statements to the press unless deemed appropriate by the fire marshal/official, EMS captain, emergency management coordinator, or police department. MEMBERS OF THE FIRE DEPARTMENT THAT ARE NOT DESIGNATED AS THE PIO SHOULD MAKE NO COMMENTS REGARDING THE ABOVE TO THE PRESS AT ALL.

Upon completion of the incident, the incident commander shall transfer to the appropriate official, all facts concerning the fire department's actions at the scene. In large scale emergencies or high visibility incidents, a written statement should be prepared by the appropriate representative and distributed as the official statement.

At incidents where the fire department has primary or sole responsibility, the incident commander or his designee shall be appointed as the PIO. If someone is already performing the task of PIO when the fire chief arrives, he should be briefed as to the facts & assume command of that function.

NON-EMERGENCY INCIDENTS:

1. Fire company fund-raisers, dinners, etc. - The appropriate fire company that is sponsoring the event, shall designate a PIO or a publicity committee, for these events that do not directly relate to the overall operations of the Fire Department.
2. Fire prevention, budget elections, etc. - The fire chief or his/her designee shall be designated as the PIO for press relations for these types of events that relate to the Fire Department, but are not related to an emergency incident