



PAMBANSANG PUNONGHIMPILAN TANOD BAYBAYIN NG PILIPINAS
(National Headquarters Philippine Coast Guard)
139 25th St., Port Area
1018 Manila

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NHQ-PCG/CGPAO

STANDING OPERATING PROCEDURES
NUMBER 14-19

**GUIDELINES FOR PHILIPPINE COAST GUARD DESIGNATED SPOKESPERSONS,
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICERS AND POINT OF CONTACTS (POCs)
DURING MEDIA INTERVIEW**

I. REFERENCES:

- A. Section 3, Executive Order Nr 2, "Data Privacy Act of 2012" (Republic Act 10173)
- B. Executive Order Nr 02 (Operationalizing in the Executive Branch the People's Constitutional Right to Information and the State Policies to Full Public Disclosure and Transparency in the Public Service and Providing Guidelines)
- C. HPCG Memorandum Circular Nr 09-14 dated 01 September 2014 (Policy Guidelines to Raise Security, Awareness, Consciousness and Discipline or the Use of Information of the PCG Personnel)
- D. US Department Homeland Security, US Coast Guard Public Affairs Manual, January 2008; COMDTINST M5728.2D; [http://ppgroup.uscgaux.info/manuals/USCG Public Affairs Manual.pdf](http://ppgroup.uscgaux.info/manuals/USCG_Public_Affairs_Manual.pdf), dated January 2008

II. PURPOSE:

The Standing Operating Procedure (SOP) provides instruction and primary policy guidance for designated spokespersons, public affairs officers (PAOs), and point of contacts (POCs) during the conduct of media relations activity under the public affairs programs for the Philippine Coast Guard in order to establish a strong and viable public affairs programs in all districts, stations, and sub-stations nationwide.

III. SCOPE:

This SOP applies to all PCG districts. All Commanders and spokespersons, PAOs, and POCs shall ensure compliance with the provision of this circular.

IV. OBJECTIVES:

The following are the objectives of the Coast Guard Public Affairs:

- A. To keep the general public informed about the PCG's ongoing operations and programs to foster understanding and support for all our missions;
- B. To take an active role in community activities and challenges;
- C. To promote saving of lives and properties, most especially at sea, by educating and informing the public, thus reducing accidents and casualties;
- D. To dissuade and prevent illegal activity before it begins;

V. GENERAL PROVISIONS:

PUBLIC AFFAIRS POLICY:

- A. **Public information.** Make available to the public all information concerning the activities of the service except that information which is restricted by law.
- B. **Command Responsibility.** Public Affairs is a command responsibility. District Commanders and Public Affairs Officers have the authority to release information pertaining to their respective AORs and are responsible for ensuring that their unit's public affairs program is conducted in accordance with the guidance contained herein. The District Commander may authorize the Station and Sub-Station Commander to act as a spokesperson and release information pertaining to their respective AORs.
- C. **Proactive.** The Coast Guard's Public Affairs Program is active, not passive. Accurate and timely information must be provided by the most efficient means possible.
- D. **Releasing of Information.** Public Affairs Officers are authorized and encouraged to publicly discuss non-restricted aspects of his AOR, using the following guidelines:
 - 1. The PAO is authorized only to divulge information he is accountable for.
 - 2. If uncertain, seek guidance from CPCG or CGPAO.

E. **Withholding Information.** Generally, information should be withheld only if it is:

1. Classified matters as provided in the HPCG Memorandum Circular Nr. 09-14.
2. Specifically required to be withheld by a national law.
3. A clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.
4. Information which could jeopardize or interfere with a judicial proceeding or law enforcement official or activity.

F. **Releasing Bad News.** Negative or bad news should be released with the same care and speed as favorable news. Withholding negative information can compound a problem by creating the appearance of a cover-up.

G. **Tell the truth.** Avoid lying or misleading the member of the media or public.

VI. GENERAL GUIDELINES:

A. Guidelines for talking to the press:

The mass media provide us a valuable service by helping keep our citizens informed of PCG's operations. In relation to the above, there will be a need for statements to the media during significant events or accomplishments. There is merit, however, in preparing a holding statement as part of the emergency preparation process.

The following are the guidelines on dealing with the press:

1. Before contacting the media, get and give only the facts in order. This is easily accomplished by writing a fact sheet of information. Be sure to update the fact sheet as new information becomes available. If gathering information needs more time, notify the journalists that he or she needs wait to wait;
2. Manage ambiguity; avoid speculation and injecting personal opinion or guess. Never lie and exaggerate. The interviewee can always find out and report back later. Minimize the focus on the need for immediate figures, and refocus the interview on the importance of receiving verified and accurate figures;
3. Always talk "on the record". There really is no such thing as "off the record". A journalist may use everything you say before, during and after an interview. Never say anything to a journalist that would not want the superior to see in the newspaper or hear on television. Keep in mind that there is no "off the record" status. Everything the interviewee say can and maybe used.

Choose words carefully and thoughtfully. Never try to be glib or inject humor, as it may be viewed out of context and considered inappropriate;

4. Do not discuss anything that does not pertain directly to the case. Do not discuss irrelevant policy, regional or national issues. Refer journalists to the proper public affairs office for inquiries beyond the area of responsibility;

5. Do not use the phrase "no comment". There are only three acceptable answers to any question: The answer. Straight-forward, factual. Explanatory, if appropriate. "I don't know, but I'll find out the answer and get back to you promptly". Then do it. "I know, but I can't tell you because..." Then explain which statements such as "The investigation is ongoing, that touches on classified issues that I will not discuss";

6. Always speak in good taste; avoid profanity or slang. They will not be able to follow the various governmental acronyms or highly technical information. It may also be necessary to spell out words not familiar to the interviewer;

7. Ask for clarification of vague questions. Clarification is essential. Be cautious and use good judgment;

8. Don't allow the journalist to put words in the interviewee's mouth. If the reporter describes something incorrectly, make sure the District/Station Commander or Public Affairs Officer describe it properly. Do not accept terminology with which the aforesaid personnel don't agree. Explain the correct terminology and use it. You are the expert; take the lead if necessary. Challenge inaccuracies and misinformation in a non-threatening way;

9. When giving phone interviews, please find out the number where the District/Station Commander or Public Affairs Officer can reach the interviewer if you need to update him or her at a later time. Predetermine when and how the information that you provide will be used. This will avoid having statements that you make being used out of context;

10. Be cautious when dealing with classified information and law enforcement cases. This is not justification for withholding it or covering it up acts that will probably make a bad situation worse. You may delay your response, however, while you contact higher authority for guidance;

11. PCG personnel who present personal or individual views must make clear that they are presenting their personal and/or individual views-not views of PCG and should not be as a PCG representative or make reference to their official title or position in the piece. It presupposes that a standpoint in relation to duties and responsibilities bestowed upon PCG by law must be firm.

12. Follow up and don't forget to tie up loose ends after the interview. Ensure that a staff follows through on securing any supplemental information. In-

form the interviewer for the availability of additional information or clarification if needed.

B. Guidelines when preparing for interview:

Television:

1. Choose or designate an appropriate and comfortable place to conduct the interview at, keeping in mind noise levels and background lighting;
2. Impress the interviewer with gesture, quality of voice and avoid awkward mannerisms;
3. Have a prepared and rehearsed 20-30 second sound bite or statement that you deliver, summarizing your interview; and
4. If a mistake was made, stop and rephrase.

Radio:

1. Choose a quiet space for better sound quality. Select a quiet location away from noises that may distract your interview;
2. Be brief and concise, speaking in a normal conversational tone.;
3. Take a moment or two to choose your words carefully, when necessary; and
4. Obtain a phone number where you can call in additional information or updates.

Print:

1. Before the interview discuss with the reporter how the interview material will be used to avoid the "out of context" issues;
2. Spell names and words most likely to be misspelled;
3. In TV and radio, interview times are pre-arranged. However, print and online journalists have deadlines to meet and are interested in the information you can provide; and
4. Obtain a phone number of the journalist who the interviewee can supply with updates.

C. District/Station Commanders and Command Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) should make advance contact with local and regional public affairs counterparts in other agencies. This will enable you to establish a working relationship with them



and identify you as their point of contact with the Coast Guard. This is important when lead agencies release information or hold news briefings or conferences regarding operations with Coast Guard involvement.

D. Video and still photography of dispatch of search and rescue cases should be made available to the media as soon as possible. However, the Coast Guard will not normally release video or photography that depicts dead, mutilated bodies or any too graphic and morbid images/footages. Each District/Station commander has authority to make the determination of whether the material should be released.

VII. DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

Each PCG district shall establish a Public Affairs Office to serve as the focal point in media relations and public information dissemination. The designated Public Affairs Officer (PAO) shall act as the official spokesperson of the unit, unless otherwise provided.

A. District Commanders shall:

1. Act as primary spokesperson to the media on all activities of the command/unit;
2. Approve the release of news of activities of their respective commands;
3. Handle all media inquiries by holding a press conference or interview to answer questions about the Coast Guard's response in a particular case; and
4. Coordinate with the Commandant, PCG for guidance or assistance when the information falls within the purview of the Commandant.

In the absence of the District Commanders, the command/unit shall select PAOs based on their knowledge of the Coast Guard's mission, functions, current thrusts and communications skills. When designating a PAO, unit commanders should remember that the individual assigned will be the person who most represents the unit to the media and the public.

B. Public Affairs Officers shall:

1. Serve as spokespersons in the absence of the District/Station Commander and conduct media relations programs at the district/area level;
2. Provide public affairs support to all Coast Guard units located within the geographic boundaries of the area or district;
3. Conduct proactive media relations to inform the public of significant district/area operations, events, announcements and issues;

4. Respond to inquiries from the media and the public at all times to assist and respond in urgent and crisis situations;
5. Deploy personnel to collect information and conduct photo/video coverage to unexpected events (oil spills, major search and rescue, etc);
6. Participate in all aspects of area or district plans and operations; and
7. Maintain regular contact with the units within their area of responsibility during any response to a crisis or critical incident in which the units are involved.

VIII. ADMINISTRATIVE SANCTION

Any violation of the provisions of the guidelines shall constitute misconduct and it is punishable by suspension without pay of one (1) month and one (1) day to six (6) months for the first offense and dismissal without honor from the service for the second offense pursuant to sub-paragraph C of Title IX of Guidance and Procedures on Disposition of Violations of the Code of Conduct and Discipline for PCG Uniformed Personnel dated 30 August 2016.

IX. RESCISSION

All existing rules, regulations and policies in conflict with these guidelines are hereby rescinded or modified accordingly.


X. EFFECTIVITY

This SOP shall take effect upon publication.

BY COMMAND OF ADMIRAL HERMOGINO:

OFFICIAL:

EDUARDO D FABRICANTE
COMMO PCG
Chief of Coast Guard Staff


LIEZEL B BAUTISTA
CDR PCG
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27/09/19