COMMUNITY ALERTS

I. Purpose

This Procedure will:

A. State Departmental policy regarding community alerts.

B. Explain when to distribute a community alert when the crime is not a sexual assault.

C. Further explain the guidelines for community alerts when there has been a sexual assault by a stranger.

D. Set forth the notification procedures for community alerts.

E. Specify the responsibilities of the Community Relations Section.

F. Describe the department's community alert distribution process, record keeping and follow-up procedures.

II. Department Policy

A. It is the policy of the Cambridge Police Department to alert the public to serious offenses within the city's neighborhoods when the public may benefit from the release of that information and when the release of the information does not compromise the criminal investigation or the confidentiality of witnesses and victims. Crime alerts have proven to be a valuable resource in a community's fight against crime. They may assist law enforcement in the identification of criminal suspects and it emphasizes police and community working together to identify and solve neighborhood crime problems. There are also many things that individual residents can do to protect themselves, their families, and their property when appropriately alerted to a crime problem. The use of community alerts creates a spirit of cooperation between the public and the police, which inevitably leads to a safer environment for all.

III. Guidelines for the Issuance of Community Alerts when the Crime is not a Sexual Assault.

A. Community Alerts should be distributed to neighborhoods when, in the judgment of the Commanding Officer of the Investigations Section, the public may benefit from the release of the information and when the release will not compromise the criminal investigation or the confidentiality of witnesses and victims.

B. Community Alerts should be distributed to the affected Neighborhood(s) providing that there is no compromise to the investigation (see above), when:

1. There has been a pattern of serious crime in a neighborhood and there is reason to believe that citizens can assist by taking measures to prevent any further crime of this type.

2. The Commanding Officer of Investigations Section determines that citizens in the affected neighborhood will be safer if they were aware of a recent crime(s).

3. The Commanding Officer of Investigations Section determines that the assistance of the community is helpful in identifying the perpetrators of the crime(s).

4. When members of the Community request specific information about a crime be released, in order to be able to protect themselves and provide investigative information, this request will be directed to the Neighborhood Coordinator who will coordinate the release of the information with the Investigations Section.

C. The Commanding Officer of Investigations Section or his designee will be responsible for drafting the community alert and submitting it to the Commissioner for approval.

IV. Guidelines for Community Alerts Where There Has Been a Sexual Assault By A Stranger.

A. The Supervisor (or designee) of the Sexual Assault Unit will be responsible for the following when there has been a confirmed "stranger" sexual assault incident in the City of Cambridge.

1. The Supervisor will not release the identity or any facts that may reveal the identity of the victim or voluntary witnesses.

2. The Supervisor will assess the circumstances of the assault in order to ensure that the crime is classified correctly.

3. The location of the incident will normally be a geographical area, the size to be determined and based upon the need to alert the residents in the identified area.

4. The Supervisor will draft a written statement of facts for the commanding officer's approval and dissemination.

V. Notification Procedure

A. When the above conditions have been met, the Commissioner or his designee will authorize the community alert for distribution.

B. The Public Information Officer will be notified by the Investigations Section or the Community Relations Section and the P.I.O. will make timely notifications to the media with an emphasis on local newspapers and weekly cable television show. Any press release will comply with Policy and Procedure 2000-4 and will be approved by the Commissioner.

C. After approval by the Commissioner, the Commanding Officer or Supervisor in charge of the investigation will contact the Community Relations Section supervisor and provide the approved community alert.

VI. Responsibilities of the Community Relations Section

A. It will be the responsibility of the Community Relations Section to maintain accurate and up-to-date databases in order to facilitate Community Alerts.

B. The Supervisor of the Community Relations Section will determine, in coordination with the Investigation Section, based on the type of incident, the geographic location, the time of day, the time of year and any other pertinent factors in order to determine the correct distribution for the alert.

1. Delivery of Alerts:

   a. Alerts will always be forwarded either electronically or by hand to the City Manager, the City Councilors (9), and Emergency Communications Center supervisor.

   b. Alerts concerning a sexual assault by a stranger will be either electronically delivered or hand delivered to the Director of the Women's Commission.

c. Alerts will be either electronically delivered or hand delivered to the following:

1. The Director of the Women's Commission
2. MIT Police Department
3. Harvard University Police Department
4. Massachusetts State Police
5. MBTA Police
6. The four state representatives and two senators from the City of Cambridge
7. The six School Committee members
8. Cambridge Housing Authority Security
9. Superintendent of Schools
10. CRLS Security Director
11. Appropriate Cambridge City Department Heads
12. Community gathering sites, such as retail establishments, office building, schools, libraries, churches, restaurants, convenience stores, grocery stores, Laundromats, public transportation sites in the geographically affected area.
13. Community residents and community agencies in the affected area.

d. Community alerts may be delivered electronically or by mail to residents living in the affected neighborhood.

2. Posting of Community Alerts

a. It will be the responsibility of the Community Relations Section to post written Community Alerts conspicuously throughout the affected neighborhoods. The Alert may be posted in the following locations:

1. Libraries
2. Laundromats
3. Variety Stores
4. Community Bulletin Boards
5. Youth Centers
6. Schools
7. Churches

3. Telephone Alerts

a. When the Investigations Section decides to issue a community alert, the Commanding Officer will notify the CPD Public Information Officer by telephone.

b. The Neighborhood Coordinator or other designated Community Relations Section personnel will notify the following persons by telephone:

1. City Council Office
2. Other City officials, as determined to be appropriate
3. Key neighborhood contacts in the affected area

c. Telephone calls will be made as soon as the written Alert is prepared, copied and labeled.

d. The telephone message will state the information on the Community Alert flyer and indicate whether the person being called is also receiving a hand-delivered or mailed flyer.

e. Reasonable attempts will be made to leave a message if there is no answer.

f. The Reverse 911 System may be activated to notify the affected neighborhood of criminal activity, as determined by the Police Commissioner.

C. Cambridge Police Department Community Alert Distribution

The Community Relations Section within the Cambridge Police Department will distribute the written Community Alert in the following manner

1. Public Information Officer (as soon as the Alert is approved)
2. Shift Commanders (sufficient copies for three roll calls)
3. Investigations Section
4. Crime Analysis Unit (one hard copy and one e-mailed). This will be posted by the Crime Analysis Unit on the CPD Web page.
5. Appropriate Sector Lieutenant(s) and Neighborhood Sergeant(s)
6. 25 copies in the Cambridge Police Department lobby
7. All Community Relations Section personnel mail boxes

D. Record Keeping and Follow-up

1. A copy of the written alert should be placed in the "Alert" folder on the S drive and the "Community Alert" folder on the R drive.

2. A memo will be written which includes the following:

   a. When and to whom telephone calls were made, indicating anyone not reached by telephone (where no message could be left).
   b. Name of the person who received each of the hand delivered Alerts.
   c. Names of persons who were mailed or e-mailed the Alert.
   d. The following will be attached to the memo
      1. a map indicating the door-to-door distribution area, if done.
      2. a copy of the Alert.
   e. The memo will be approved by a supervisor of the Community Relations Section and distributed to the following CPD personnel following the completion of the Alert delivery protocol.
      1. Police Commissioner
      2. Superintendents
      3. Investigations Deputy Superintendent
      4. Patrol Deputies
      5. Community Relations Commander
      6. Public Information Officer

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Police Commissioner