ST. CHARLES PARISH MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY

I. GOAL

It is the sincere intention of St. Charles Parish government to keep its residents, businesses and visitors informed of parish business on a daily and/or as-needed basis. One of the ways the parish accomplishes this is through partnership with members of the press. This policy covers general media relations behavior in regard to parish government departments under the direction of the parish president.

II. POLICY

Inquiries from the news media are given a high priority by St. Charles Parish and should be responded to as quickly and efficiently as possible. Every effort should be made to meet a particular reporter's deadlines and ensure that any information released is accurate.

The St. Charles Parish Public Information Office is primarily responsible for the parish's media relations. All parish employees, excluding department directors or assistant directors, should forward any media inquiries to the Public Information Office and/or Public Information Officer immediately for follow-up.

An appropriate response can be: "I'm sorry I don't have the full information regarding that issue. I will give your request to my department director and/or the public information office who will respond to you as soon as they are available." Please obtain the reporter's name, cell phone number, topic of story and deadline.

III. SPOKESPERSONS

Unless otherwise authorized, the parish's spokespersons are:
Parish President
Public Information Officer
Department Heads, Assistant Department Heads or the Department Head's Designee

*** NO other parish employees except the above may speak to the media, at any time.**

* It should be noted that **Parish Council members** or other **parish elected officials** serve as their own spokespersons or may designate someone to speak on their behalf, such as the council secretary.

IV. SENSITIVE OR CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

All television, radio, newspaper or other media inquiries regarding sensitive or controversial issues should always be referred immediately to the Public Information Office. Staff will coordinate a response including designating a spokesperson after consultation with the Parish President and appropriate department.

V. LITIGATION, PERSONNEL AND ELECTION ISSUES

Generally, the business conducted by the parish is public and therefore is public information. Inquiries regarding pending litigation, matters involving a significant exposure to litigation and certain personnel-related information are exceptions.

Inquiries regarding pending, ongoing or exposure to litigation or personnel matters should be referred to the Public Information Office immediately without any other comment.

Inquiries regarding election and campaign issues should be referred to the St. Charles Parish Registrar of Voters Office and/or Public Information Office.

VI. GENERAL OR ROUTINE ISSUES

Local print media: Calls from local print media regarding most departmental issues and programs may be handled by each department's Director or Assistant Director. The Public Information Office should be informed of these media requests, including the reporter and topic, either before or immediately following these interviews.

Broadcast media: Calls from broadcast media (TV and radio) should always be referred immediately to the Public Information Office. Staff will coordinate a response including designating a spokesperson after consultation with the Parish President and relevant department.

VII. PARISH-INITIATED INFORMATION

Proactive media contact is initiated through the Public Information Office. This includes issuing press releases and media advisories, and personal contacts with reporters and editors for coverage. Departments seeking publicity for events and/or activities should contact the Public Information Office as soon as possible to ensure the best media coverage of the activity.

Departments should NOT initiate news media contacts before notifying the Public Information Office.

VIII. CRIME / FIRE / PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES

All media calls to parish staff regarding a police or fire issue should be referred immediately to the Sheriff's Office Public Information Officer or the Fire Chief as appropriate.

IX. EMERGENCY ISSUES

During times or emergency or Emergency Operations Center activation, the Public Information Officer and/or Emergency Preparedness Director serve as primary spokespersons for the parish and all emergency operations, which can include actions of medical, fire, police, transportation and other emergency personnel.

Because of the special nature of these events, the Public Information Officer should be briefed fully and completely about the actions of all agencies at least twice daily during operations.

The Public Information Officer disseminates all official press releases and media advisories approved by EOC staff.

All efforts should be made to engage members of the press in interviews either outside of EOC or in a designated area to ensure a secure working environment for responding personnel.

From time to time, members of the media may be invited into EOC to obtain photos

or video of working staff. A designated EOC staff member will accompany the crew at all times, and shooting time will be limited. Staff members should not speak to these crews while they are present in EOC.

EOC Coordinators are authorized to confirm incident information to reporters in the absence of assistance from the Public Information Office.

Approved by: _____

Date: 4/4/11