



MEDIA RELATIONS

1.0 General

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to: (i) identify the roles and responsibilities of Media Relations Officers (MROs); and (ii) outline the procedures for RNC employees to follow when communicating and releasing information to media.
- 1.2 This policy reflects a balance between the public's right to know and the individual's right to privacy. From time to time, specific cases will require additional evaluation, as no policy can be developed to meet every situation.
- 1.3 RNC employees involved in preparing and/or issuing media releases must be aware of their duty to protect individual privacy rights and of the potential risk to the RNC of not acting in compliance with this policy. Consequently, RNC employees who have not received media training shall not issue any media release without consulting an employee who is media trained.
- 1.4 When guidance is needed in relation to the release of information to the media, contact the MRO on the Northeast Avalon:
 - a. During normal business hours, the MRO can be contacted at telephone: (709) ██████ 658, or by email: rncmediarelations ██████. After hours, the on-call MRO can be contacted at telephone: (709) ██████ 577
 - b. For further guidance or when the MRO is not available, contact: Deputy Chief of Police (Patrol or Criminal Operations), or their designate.
- 1.5 Police officers releasing information shall identify themselves by name and rank.

2.0 Media Release Standards and References

- 2.1 Applying common standards for RNC media releases will ensure organization-wide consistency of content and appearance.
- 2.2 Every RNC media release reflects on the professionalism of the RNC. RNC media releases must always strike a balance between the public's right to know and the individual's right to privacy, and protect police information that forms part of an investigation or that may divulge investigative techniques.

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2.3 RNC media releases shall provide the following:

- a. Accurate information that has been verified, and authorized, as required;
- b. Concise information that is clearly presented, avoids unnecessary detail and is written in plain language avoiding the use of acronyms and police jargon;
- c. The required facts (who, what, when, where, why and how) to minimize the need for media call-backs with clarifying questions;
- d. Information that is impartial and professionally delivered, without unnecessary:
 - (1) adjectives;
 - (2) adverbs;
 - (3) intensifiers (e.g. *"unfortunately"* or *"tragically"*);
 - (4) sarcasm (e.g. *"he's probably thinking that fleeing from the police may not have been a wise decision"*); or
 - (5) preaching (e.g. *"unfortunately some have decided to not abide by the rules of the road"*)
- e. Content that is presented in a format consistent with a business communication and not a police report;
- f. A contact name and telephone number for an RNC employee who will be available to answer media queries in a timely manner;
- g. Capitalization of all surnames used (e.g. John SMITH);
- h. Proper sentence structure, spelling and grammar;
- i. Dollar amounts expressed without the decimal point and zeroes when the dollar sign is used (e.g. \$2,000 not \$2000.00).

3.0 Media Relations Officer Responsibilities

- 3.1 The Chief of Police is the official spokesperson for the RNC. The Chief may authorize an MRO or other designated person to disseminate information to the

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public. The MRO assigned in the Northeast Avalon region will report as required to the Chief of Police or his designate.

- 3.2 An Inspector is responsible for regional operations at each of Corner Brook and Lab West detachment. The Inspectors are the Officer in Charge of Operations. The Superintendent is the Officer in Charge of the Corner Brook Labrador Division. The MRO assigned in Corner Brook will report directly to the Superintendent of regional operations. The MRO assigned to Labrador will report directly to the Inspector responsible for Labrador operations and in consultation with the Superintendent of regional operations. The MRO's assigned to Corner Brook and Labrador will liaise with the MRO assigned to the North East Avalon Region on all media releases that are expected to attract significant media attention.
- 3.3 The MRO has the responsibility to:
- a. conduct interviews for local media and arrange interviews with the Chief of Police, commissioned officers, and police officers;
 - b. use pro-active initiatives to enhance the positive image of the RNC and enable the media to cover stories effectively and communicate the facts to the public;
 - c. liaise with the Chief of Police or designate to develop a communications strategy and draft any official media release(s);
 - d. maintain copies, both electronic and hardcopy of all official media releases;
 - e. send by e-mail a copy of any distributed media release to the appropriate investigating police officer(s);
 - f. maintain an up-to-date media contact list for distribution of media releases/advisories;
 - g. develop and maintain effective working relationships with representatives of electronic and print media;
 - h. assist any police officer or section in coordinating the release of authorized information;

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- i. assist and liaise with Corner Brook and Labrador MROs in the dissemination of information that are not routine and reasonably expected to attract significant media or public attention;
 - j. report as required to scenes of major incidents to relieve the Incident Commander and operational personnel of media liaison responsibilities; and
 - k. arrange formal news conferences as requested by the Chief of Police.
- 3.4 The release of information to the news media is the responsibility of the MRO. However;
- a. police officers from other sections of the RNC may also release information, when requested by the MRO or when otherwise permitted in accordance with this policy;
 - b. when no one from the Media Relations Office is available, a media trained police officer at a scene may release information in accordance to this policy;
 - c. all media inquiries shall be referred to the MRO. If the MRO is not available, the inquiries shall be referred to the Duty Officer.
- 3.5 For incidents that may attract significant media attention, a copy of the media release shall be forwarded to the MRO and the Office of the Chief of Police for approval prior to distribution to the media.
- 4.0 Mandatory Notification to the MRO**
- 4.1 The MRO can provide the highest level of service to operational personnel if notified as early as possible of an incident likely to attract considerable media interest.
- 4.2 RNC employees are required to notify the MRO about situations or incidents that have the potential to impact the RNC as a whole, prior to the release of any information to the media.
- 4.3 Mandatory notification to the MRO is required for the following:
- a. Criminal Investigation Division investigations whereby a major case manager has been assigned;

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- b. on- or off-duty incidents where an RNC police officer is killed or seriously injured;
- c. incidents where an RNC police officer on or off duty, is charged with a criminal offence;
- d. incidents where an RNC police officer, on duty, is charged with a provincial offence;
- e. incidents where an RNC civilian, on duty, is charged with a criminal offence;
- f. incidents involving fatalities; except non-criminal sudden deaths;
- g. where there has been a release of inaccurate information to media;
- h. high-risk offender notifications issued to the public;
- i. incidents or investigations that may/do attract regional, provincial, national or international media and/or public attention.

5.0 Duty Officer Responsibilities

- 5.1 The Duty Officer is responsible to notify the MRO of any incident that is subject to Mandatory Notifications. The Duty Officer, or designate, will notify the MRO at the onset of a major incident which attracts media attention. After consultation with the MRO, the decision to call out the MRO shall be that of the Duty Officer.
- 5.2 In the event that the MRO in Corner Brook or Labrador is not available, the Duty Officer is responsible to make notification directly to the MRO assigned to the Northeast Avalon region.
- 5.3 In the event that the MRO for the Northeast Avalon is not available, the Duty Officer shall make notification directly to the Deputy Chief of Police (Patrol or Criminal Operations), or designate, prior to releasing any information subject to the requirements for mandatory notification to the MRO.

6.0 Divisional Commander Responsibilities

- 6.1 The Divisional Commander or designate is responsible to:
 - a. release news information to the media, at their discretion; and

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b. complete a Media Report prior to ending his/her shift containing the following:

- (1) total number of calls for service;
- (2) total arrests and breakdown of each arrest including associated occurrence numbers;
- (3) number of traffic collisions, including associated occurrence numbers for collisions involving personal injury; and
- (4) details of noteworthy incidents in accordance with this policy.

6.2 When providing information to the media about an incident, the following types of information can generally be provided;

- a. location of the incident however, if the location is a residence, only advise in what area of the community it occurred;
- b. nature and time of the incident, including a general description of what appears to have taken place;
- c. age and gender of accused person;
- d. specific Criminal Code sections the accused person has been charged with and their disposition (released, held for bail hearing, etc.)

7.0 Media - Police Relations

7.1 The activities of the RNC, particularly those of a sensational nature, attract public attention and comment. The public has a right to know about the services the RNC performs on their behalf, but this right is not absolute. The public's right to information about individuals, who come in contact with police, is limited by the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (ATIPPA). Furthermore, many operations and tactics must remain confidential, in order to maintain their effectiveness. Subject to these restrictions, the RNC will be as open and cooperative with the community and the news media as possible, both in a reactive and proactive manner. Police officers therefore shall, whenever possible, assist the news media on all matters of a public nature.

7.2 Journalists shall be allowed no less access to an incident area than is given to the general public. Additionally, even in areas where access to the general public is restricted, journalists shall be allowed to get as close to the actual scene of the

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incident as possible without interfering with the lawful duties of a police officer. If there is no danger or risk of jeopardizing the investigation, the police officer in charge of the incident shall permit journalists, particularly photographers, to enter occurrence areas to obtain required information.

- 7.3 Journalists at the scene of an occurrence shall show their official identification. When it is shown, police officers shall note the organization represented. If media representatives want more detailed information than is available at the scene, they may request it from the MRO.
- 7.4 It is sometimes necessary to deny journalists access to areas because of crime scene processing. Where a journalist has been denied access to an area for this reason, s/he shall be informed accordingly and permitted access as soon as practical.

8.0 Guidelines for Release of Information

8.1 Restrictions

- a. Information shall not be released to the media when release of information could potentially:
- (1) deal with RNC policy or procedure;
 - (2) deal with discipline of RNC employees;
 - (3) endanger human life (e.g. ransom kidnapping or the use of an informant);
 - (4) interfere with an investigation or arrest (e.g. disclosing the amount of money obtained in a holdup, or other details of a crime which could be known only to the perpetrator might impair an investigation);
 - (5) violate the law (e.g. releasing the name of a Young Offender or the names of family members which may lead to the identification of a Young Offender);
 - (6) prejudice court proceedings or violate the rights of an accused, for example;
 - (7) disclose any confidential investigative techniques or operational tactics;

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- (8) disclose any confession or statement made by the accused;
 - (9) comment on cases before the courts; or
 - (10) describe the criminal record of the accused.
- 8.2 **Amber Alert:** The RNC facilitates the AMBER Alert Program in collaboration with policing agencies on behalf of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The RNC AMBER Alert Coordinator is the point of contact for any AMBER Alert and disseminates AMBER Alert information on behalf of the RNC. The Amber Alert Coordinator will notify the MRO when an Amber Alert is issued.
- 8.3 **High Risk Offender:** The Chief of Police, or designate will determine if a public notification of a high risk offender should be issued and will notify the MRO.
- 8.4 **Bail Information:** Bail information is not RNC information. Do not release. Refer media inquiries to the court.
- 8.5 **Blood Alcohol Test Results:** The specific result of a blood alcohol test shall not normally be released to the media.
- 8.6 **Charged RNC Police Officer or RNC Civilian:**
- a. When a RNC police officer or civilian is charged, it is mandatory to notify the MRO. A media release shall be considered when an RNC police officer or RNC civilian is charged. The media release, if any, shall be approved by the MRO in consultation with the Chief of Police, RNC legal counsel and the Professional Standards Section.
 - b. No RNC media release shall be issued when an RNC police officer or RNC civilian is charged by another police agency, regardless of whether or not that agency has issued a release in relation to the charge. This is not considered RNC information. However, the incident is subject to Mandatory Notification to the MRO for development of a communications strategy and media response, as necessary.
 - c. If a charged RNC police officer was in an undercover capacity or if the incident involves a government approved unmarked vehicle or anonymous plated vehicle, the matter shall be brought to the attention of the MRO and evaluated with the relevant Commanding Officer prior to the release of any information to the media.

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- d. In addition to information under section 8.9 of this policy, the following information shall also be provided in a media release about a charged RNC police officer or RNC civilian:
- (1) rank
 - (2) one of the following:
 - (i) new officer ($5 \leq$ years of service)
 - (ii) mid-career ($6 \leq 15$ years of service)
 - (iii) veteran ($16 \geq$ years service)
 - (3) work status (e.g. suspended with/without pay, assigned to other duties)

8.7 Charged Persons

- a. A charged person is defined as a person who:
- (1) is arrested and released in accordance with Part XVI of the Criminal Code; or
 - (2) is being held in custody and an information has been laid under the Criminal Code or other federal act, but has not yet been released; or
 - (3) has been issued appropriate documentation for a violation of provincial legislation.

8.8 Charged Person – Warrant of Arrest: This section is subject to Mandatory Notification to the MRO. In exigent circumstances where a person who is subject to an arrest warrant poses a significant risk of harm to the public, to property or to him/her self, and locating the person is necessary for purposes of apprehension, personal information may be released to the media.

8.9 Charged Person – Release of Information Details

- a. Information about a charged person may be released to the media after it is sworn in court.
- b. Adult Person: As defined under *ATIPPA* under section 2(o), personal information that may be released about a charged adult person includes name, gender, age and municipality in which the person lives;

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- c. Young Person: Information relating to a young person charged under the YCJA can only include age, gender and municipality in which the young person lives, providing that releasing this basic information cannot identify the young person.
- d. Subject to the above for both adult and young persons, other details that may also be released include:
 - (1) Charges, breaches of probation, undertaking or recognizance are to be referred to only as "*breach(es) of court order(s)*".
 - (2) a generic description of the circumstances surrounding the charges;
 - (3) arrest date; and
 - (4) location and date of the first court appearance
- e. Information that shall not be released includes, but is not limited to:
 - (1) the name of the charged person in incidents of sexual and/or domestic assault, if by doing so, a victim is identified (unless the victim is involved in a serious assault such as attempted murder);
 - (2) a person's criminal record which remains protected under *ATIPPA*
 - (3) the race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation of the accused.
 - (4) in circumstances whereby an individual has been charged but the information has not yet been sworn in a court of law, the name of the accused person shall NOT be released.
 - (5) the name of a young person less than 18 years of age;
 - (6) the name of a person 18 years of age or older if the charges relate to an offence committed when the person was 17 years of age or younger (Authority: YCJA).
- f. When unsure as to whether the name of a person involved with an incident should be released, contact the MRO or designate for guidance.

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8.10 Complainant

- a. Do not release the name of a complainant.
- b. It is permissible to state whether or not the victim and accused were known to each other.

8.11 Crime Stoppers Cash Reward

- a. Media releases that announce both an RNC and a Crime Stoppers cash reward require clear articulation of potential funds that may be available to be paid out to ensure there is no confusion to the public. It is recommended that the following wording be used when preparing these releases:

“Any person with information regarding the person(s) responsible for (incident) should immediately contact the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary at (709) 729-8000, or their nearest police authority. Should you wish to remain anonymous, you may call Crime Stoppers at 1(800)222-TIPS (8477), where you may be eligible to receive a cash award.”

8.12 Criminal Record: A criminal record is not RNC information. Do not release. A person’s criminal record remains protected by ATIPPA.

8.13 Critical Incident: The MRO, after consultation with the officer in charge of the scene, will provide information to journalists. S/he will also advise the officer in charge on strategies for dealing with media personnel, including the location of an outer perimeter media post, to which all journalists shall be directed.

8.14 Deceased Person – Identification:

- a. The name of a deceased person may be released to the media, only after:
 - (1) next of kin of the deceased has been notified; or
 - (2) every effort has been made to locate next of kin of the deceased and it is apparent that considerable delay will ensue before notification can be made; or
 - (3) a determination has been made that publicizing the name will assist in locating next of kin.

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- (4) consultation with family members. In certain circumstances the RNC may decide to release the identity of the deceased.
- b. Temporarily withholding the name of the deceased person from the media may be considered for:
 - (1) investigative purposes; or
 - (2) compassionate grounds when next of kin request time to make their own arrangements for notifications; or
 - (3) suicide investigations, except as otherwise provided in Section 8.16 of this policy, the name of a person who commits suicide shall not be released to the media.
 - (4) In such circumstances, the media shall be advised of the reason for temporarily withholding the name and that the name will be released as soon as possible.

8.15 Deceased Person – Cause of Death: The cause of death shall not be released until determined and confirmed in writing by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. Only in the best interest of the investigation and in consultation with family members, with the cause of death be released.

8.16 Suicide Investigation

- a. The name of the person who commits suicide shall not be released to the media except in certain circumstances.
- b. The name of a suicide victim may be released to the media in circumstances that include:
 - (1) murder/suicide cases;
 - (2) where the subject of an investigation, for example a missing person, has been identified to the media as a means of locating them and the person is subsequently found deceased as the result or suicide, the media release shall state: "foul play is not suspected." The media release shall not state that the person "committed suicide";
 - (3) others, as approved by the regional MRO or designate.

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8.17 Escapees

- a. **Adult Person:** Information that may be released to the media about an escaped adult person includes: name, age, detention facility, physical description and photograph, if available.
- b. **Young Person:** No information may be released to the media about an escaped young person less than 18 years of age other than a general description (e.g. male, Caucasian, 17 years old, 5'11" wearing jeans).
- c. **Exceptions – Escapee Young Person:** This subsection is subject to Mandatory Notification to the MRO. On the ex parte application of a peace officer, a youth court justice may make an order permitting any person to publish information that identifies a young person as having committed, or allegedly committed, an indictable offence if the judge is satisfied that:
 - (1) there is a reason to believe that the young person is a danger to others; and
 - (2) publishing the information is necessary to assist in apprehension.
- d. An order ceases to have effect five (5) days after it is made (YCJA). If posted on a web page, identifying information (e.g. media release and photograph) must be removed after the five day period.

8.18 **Hospital:** Except where an injured person is under arrest or requires protection, an RNC employee has no authority to restrict media interviews or photographs of an injured person in hospital.

8.19 **HTA Driver's Licence Suspension:** Do not release the name of a driver who has been issued a 24 hour driver's suspension under the HTA. This is not considered a charge.

8.20 Investigation Scene

- a. An RNC employee shall not restrict the media at the scene of a collision or crime except where necessary to protect evidence or in the interests of officer or public safety.
- b. Where a scene under investigation is on private property, the right of entry to the property rests with the owner or the owner's agent, but an RNC employee may restrict entry where necessary to protect evidence or in the

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interests of officer or public safety, or when acting under authority of a judicial order (e.g. search warrant).

8.21 Medical Information/Injuries

- a. An RNC employee may describe injuries using general descriptors, such as: no injuries, minor, minimal, moderate, major, serious, or fatal. Life threatening or non-life threatening are also acceptable terms. The recommended phrase to use when describing injuries sustained is as follows: *"The subject sustained non-life threatening injuries, believed at this time to be minor in nature"*.
- b. Descriptions of injuries sustained in motor vehicle collisions or non-criminal injury investigations, for example: suffered a broken leg or internal injuries, shall not be released to the media.
- c. Medical information, such as heart conditions, epilepsy, HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis B, psychiatric evaluations, pregnancy, etc., are considered private, personal information and must not be released except when Specific medical information relating to a person is perceived as a public health or safety issue or a law enforcement issue.
 - (1) The regional MRO or designate must be consulted prior to releasing medical information to the media.

8.22 Parole Information: This is not RNC information. Do not release. Refer media inquiries to the appropriate probation or parole office.

8.23 Person of Interest

- a. Do not release the name of a person of interest without consultation with the Chief of Police or designate. The name is private information unless the person is formally charged.
- b. A composite drawing, a description or video recording of a person of interest, not known to police, may be released in order to secure identification.

8.24 Photographs

- a. There are instances where a photograph taken by an RNC employee will be released to the media. These instances will occur when the public's

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right to know clearly exceeds an individual's right to privacy. Those instances are as follows:

- (1) **Evidentiary – Photographs:** A photograph taken by an RNC employee may provide the media with a photograph following consultation with the regional MRO or designate.
- (2) **Public Safety – Photographs:** If a public safety risk is identified, an RNC employee may provide the media with a photograph following consultation with the regional MRO or designate.
- (3) **Prisoner Identification – Out of Custody Photograph:** Where public support is required for apprehension of a wanted person, the MRO may authorize the release of a prisoner identification photograph if no other photograph is available. The identification board shall be cropped out prior to release of the photograph. Such a release may occur only when a warrant has been issued for the suspect in question.
- (4) **If the wanted person is a young person, an RNC employee may release a photograph only in strict adherence to the YCJA as specified in Exceptions – Escapee Young Person.**

8.25 Publication Ban

- a. This is not RNC information. Do not release. Publication bans are imposed by the court. Therefore, media inquiries for information covered by the ban shall be referred to the court.
- b. If necessary, the primary investigator or case manager may consult with the Crown Attorney's Office for a legal opinion on information that may be released.

8.26 Release Conditions

- a. This is not RNC information. Do not release. Refer inquiries to the appropriate court.
- b. Court dates and court location may be released.

8.27 Sentences: This is not RNC information. Do not release. Refer inquiries to the Crown attorney.

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8.28 Suspect

- a. Do not release the name of a person suspected of having committed a crime. The name is private information unless a person is charged.
- b. A composite drawing, description or video recording of a suspect may be released to the media in order to identify a suspect not known to police.

8.29 Victim

- a. Subject to section 8.14 of this policy, only the gender, age and municipality of residence of a victim may be released.
- b. A victim may be identified if the person is a:
 - (1) victim of homicide, following positive identification and in consultation with the Criminal Investigative Division Major Case manager, and only after notification of next of kin.
 - (2) victim involved in a non-criminal death investigation, (e.g. a plane crash);
 - (3) fatal traffic collision victim, after notification of next of kin; or
 - (4) commercial enterprise that is subject to a crime, (e.g. break and enter, robbery or fraud).
- c. A victim may **not** be identified if the person is a:
 - (1) sexual assault victim;
 - (2) domestic assault victim;
 - (3) break and enter victim;
 - (4) fraud victim;
 - (5) intended victim, (e.g. conspiracy cases);
 - (6) young person who is the victim of an offence committed by a young person (Authority: YCJA);

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(7) victim injured in non-criminal investigations, excluding those specified in section 8.29b of this policy.

- d. In any motor vehicle collision where there is a potential criminal investigation, the potential criminal investigation always supersedes the motor vehicle collision investigation, when determining if a victim's name should be released.

8.30 Young Person

- a. Subject to sections 8.9 and 8.17 of this policy, the identity of a young person shall not be released to the media or an unauthorized person, as per the YCJA. The names of family members shall also not be released to the media as they could potentially identify the youth.
- b. Only the young person's age, gender, municipality in which they live and the charges laid may be released (unless releasing any of this information to the media would lead to identification of the young person).
- c. The name of a young person who is a victim of an offence allegedly committed by a young person shall not be released.

8.31 Witness: The name of a witness shall not be released.

9.0 Correcting Inaccurate Information

9.1 This section is subject to Mandatory Notification to the MRO.

9.2 An RNC employee who knows about the release of inaccurate information by the RNC to the media or the communication of inaccurate information by the media shall immediately notify the MRO or designate. Inaccurate information includes but is not limited to the following:

- a. Naming a person as "charged", who has not been charged with an offence;
- b. Naming a charged person and listing offences for which he/she has not been charged; and/or
- c. Naming a young person

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- 9.3 Upon receiving information about inaccurate information, the MRO is responsible to:
- a. notify RNC Chief of Police or designate; RNC Legal Services and RNC information Management coordinator who may notify the Provincial Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner and prepare a briefing note for distribution.
 - b. in consultation with the Chief of Police or designate and with RNC legal counsel, determine the appropriate course of action, which may include removing a media release from all known distribution points, (e.g. website, media folders, newswires and/or issuing a public retraction and/or apology).