

OTAY WATER DISTRICT
BOARD OF DIRECTORS POLICY

Subject: MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY	Policy Number	Date Adopted	Date Revised
	46	9/01/04	

PURPOSE

To establish procedures to better inform the public, Otay Water District (District) customers, businesses and other stakeholders on water, sewer and recycled water related matters by engaging in a defined and proactive media relations program.

BACKGROUND

The District recognizes an effective and quick way to communicate District policies and activities is by working in partnership with the news media. This policy requires that news media inquiries regarding the District and the District's position on matters should be given high priority, and should be responded to as quickly and efficiently as possible. Every effort should be made to reasonably meet media deadlines and to ensure that all information released is accurate and is in compliance with laws and regulations concerning individual privacy and confidentiality.

POLICY

The General Manager's office is responsible for the District's media relations program. To assist with this vital function, the District may retain media relations assistance to provide public, community and governmental relations services.

All District employees should notify the General Manager, their department's Assistant General Manager or the General Manager's staff about media inquiries. With regard to District media requests, the media representative shall contact the General Manager who is authorized to speak on behalf of the District. Because the media often work on deadlines, all departments should respond as soon as reasonably possible when the General Manager requests department information or a spokesperson for the media. Specific guidelines for responding to media requests regarding the District's position on matters are as follow:

DISTRICT SPOKESPERSONS

Unless otherwise authorized, the District's only designated spokespersons to speak on behalf of the District are:

- President of the Board of Directors
- General Manager

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- Designees authorized by General Manager as noted by General Order.

MEDIA INQUIRIES

Any media inquiry received by other District staff regarding the District or the District's position on a matter should be referred immediately to the General Manager through the Assistant General Manager or Department Chief. An appropriate response to the media is: "I'm sorry; I don't have the full information regarding that matter. I will give your request to my Department Chief, who will respond to you as soon as he/she is available. "

Any staff member should obtain the reporter's name, phone number or cell phone number, topic of the story and deadline. Staff in the General Manager's office will make all reasonable efforts to coordinate a response with the General Manager and appropriate District staff.

LITIGATION, PERSONNEL AND DISTRICT ELECTION ISSUES

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

Inquiries regarding pending litigation or exposure to litigation and District election issues should be referred to the General Manager's office.

GENERAL OR ROUTINE ISSUES

Calls from media should always be referred immediately to the General Manager's office through the employee's Department Chief or supervisor. The General Manager's office will coordinate a response, including designating a spokesperson.

When the General Manager has designated a spokesperson to respond to specific questions from the media, the General Manager should be informed of the topic, the name of the reporter and the proposed date of airing or publication, either before or immediately following these interviews.

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DISTRICT-INITIATED INFORMATION

The District also makes its own efforts to get in touch with the media. For the most part, this proactive media contact is initiated through the General Manager's office. This includes issuing press releases and media advisories, and making personal contacts with reporters and editors for stories and other coverage. Departments seeking publicity for events or activities should contact the public relations staff in the General Manager's office as soon as possible to ensure the best media coverage of their activities.

Department staff members shall not initiate news media contacts on behalf of the District before notifying the General Manager, Assistant General Manager, or department chief.

EMERGENCY/SERVICE OUTAGE ISSUES

Because the Operations Division may be called upon to restore service due to outages, breakages or in other critical situations, their work is fundamental to the overall mission of the District. As a result, Operations personnel may be the only staff at the scene of an incident and may be called upon to address service restoration questions by the media.

In these situations, all such inquiries will be immediately referred to the Chief of Operations who will make every effort to ensure that all information released is accurate, relevant and appropriate. Operations staff should notify the Chief of Operations immediately of any such media inquiry. The Chief of Operations will then take the lead for follow-up media communications and contact the General Manager.

Any media calls to other District staff regarding Operations matters should be referred immediately to the Chief of Operations, Assistant General Manager and General Manager's staff. All information released directly to the media by Operations should be provided immediately to the General Manager's staff and the Assistant General Manager.

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During a crisis or major emergency, the District's Standardized Emergency Management Plan Section 5.1-1 assigns responsibilities and procedures for handling media and customer information.

CONCLUSION

Nothing in this policy should be construed as to restrict or preclude an employee of the District or a representative of the Otay Water District Employee Association (OWDEA) or other bargaining unit from communicating with the press on matters of public concern or on matters related to association and/or union activities. However, such communications should not be made during duty-time, nor be disruptive to the District's operations, and should be clearly understood as not being made on behalf of the District or representing the District's official position on such matters.