

Town of Dorchester Chain of Command, Spokesman Policy

General:

The following policy has been enacted in the interest of ensuring that, to the best of its ability, the town of Dorchester and its employees will facilitate the accurate and prompt exchange of information with the news media. It also establishes a 'Chain of Command' when seeking legal advice (including phone and e-mail contacts) from the town attorney.

Purpose:

- To provide useful and accurate information in a timely and professional manner regarding town business as a whole.
- To ensure, as much as possible, that consistent information is being released by the town.
- To utilize the media as a resource, particularly in emergency, disaster or crisis situations.
- To establish procedures for responding to media inquiries, including identifying a town spokesman.
- To clarify the difference between being a spokesman on behalf of the town, and the expression of individual opinions of elected and appointed officials about matters related to the town.

General Procedures:

- The chairman of the Board of Selectmen, or his/her designee, shall be at the head of a chain of command when seeking legal advice (including phone and e-mail contacts) or dealing with the media. The use of the term 'designee' can be very broad, such as granting a Board or Commission access to town counsel or "cc" e-mail to other select board members.
- The chairman of the Board of Selectmen shall announce or respond to any issue of significance or controversy with a united voice pertaining to facts, information, rules and emergency or crisis situations or the established policy/rules of the town. Town staff shall not speak to a reporter or editor about a sensitive or controversial issue without authorization and prior approval by the Board of Selectmen.
- In the event of a disaster or emergency that requires the Dorchester emergency Operations Center (EOC) to be activated, either the Board of Selectmen (or designee) or the Dorchester Emergency Management Director (or designee) will be responsible for primary media relations.

Media Interaction Guidelines:

- Respond to inquiries within your responsibility. Do not respond to matters that do not directly relate to your professional responsibility for the town.
- Do not offer legal opinions on town policies or activities.
- Do not discuss employees or personnel actions.

- Do not speculate about what action the town will take.

Employees' Acting as Private Citizens: Guidelines

- Letters to the Editor or similar may not be prepared on town time, printed on town stationary, or mailed at town expense.
- Responses or letters shall not include the employees' official title or imply that the response is on behalf of the Town of Dorchester.
- Use of town e-mail is prohibited
- Use of town facilities or supplies is prohibited.
- Employees shall not be disciplined for exercising their rights as private citizens.

Amendment Procedure:

This policy may, from time to time, be amended by a majority vote of the Board of Selectmen at a regularly scheduled Selectmen's Meeting.

Effective Date:

This policy shall take effect immediately following a majority vote of the Board of Selectmen at a regularly scheduled Selectmen's Meeting.

Adopted by the Board of Selectmen on September 15, 2011

Arthur Burdette
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Michael Mock