



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
POLICE DEPARTMENT

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

	COMMUNITY ALERTS	
	POLICY NUMBER: 54-3	ISSUING AUTHORITY  Christine A. Elow Police Commissioner
	EFFECTIVE DATE: January 1, 2025	

I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES

Community alerts regarding threats to public safety can be a valuable resource in the police department's efforts to stop a threat, identify suspects, and protect community members from harm in emergencies. An alert system is most successful when police and community members work together on crime prevention, response to crime, problem solving, and other issues of public safety.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Cambridge Police Department to:

- A. alert the public to serious offenses that may jeopardize the public's safety within the city's neighborhoods;
- B. release information if it does not compromise a criminal investigation or the confidentiality of witnesses and victims; and
- C. recognize that the use of community alerts can create a spirit of cooperation between the public and the police in line with the department's mission and values.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. *PIO*: Public Information Officer who serves as the Director of Communications and Media Relations for the Police Department.

IV. PROCEDURES

- A. Guidelines for Community Alerts When the Crime is Not a Sexual Assault
 1. Community alerts should be distributed citywide or more narrowly to neighborhoods when, in the judgment of the commanding officer of the Investigations Unit and the Director of Communications and Media Relations, the public may benefit from the release of the

information and when the information will not compromise a criminal investigation or the confidentiality of witnesses and victims. Public safety is the foremost priority when drafting and distributing alerts.

2. Community alerts should be distributed citywide or to affected neighborhood(s) providing they do not compromise an investigation according to the following conditions.
 - a. There has been a pattern of crime in a neighborhood and there is reason to believe that citizens can assist by taking measures to prevent any further crime.
 - b. The commanding officer of the Investigations Unit and the Director of Communications and Media Relations determine that citizens in the affected neighborhood will be safer if they are aware of a recent crime and/or arrest of a suspect.
 - c. The commanding officer of the Investigations Unit and the Director of Communications and Media Relations determine that the assistance of the community may be helpful in identifying the perpetrators of crimes.
 - d. When members of the community request that specific information be released so they can protect themselves and provide investigative information. This request will be coordinated through the Investigations Unit and the Director of Communications and Media Relations.
 - e. There is an event that will affect large portions of the city, such as road closures, snow emergencies, construction, training initiatives, or a state-of-emergency.
3. The Director of Communications and Media Relations will work with the commanding officer of the Investigations Unit or designee in drafting community alerts and submitting them to legal counsel and the Police Commissioner or designee for approval. Once approved, the Director of Communications and Media Relations will prepare a memo regarding the alert and share it with the City of Cambridge's Communications Director, City Manager, Deputy City Manager and Public Information Officer, who will then distribute the alert with a representative of the City Council prior to public dissemination.

B. Guidelines for Community Alerts, Sexual Assault by a Stranger

1. The commanding officer of the Investigations Unit is responsible for the following when there has been a confirmed *stranger* sexual assault incident in the City of Cambridge and a community alert is determined to be an appropriate strategy by the commanding officer of the Investigations Unit and/or the Family and Social Justice Unit.
 - a. Work with the Director of Communications and Media Relations to ensure that all necessary details pertaining to the crime are provided and classified correctly.
 - b. Review a draft of any written statements provided by the Director of Communications and Media Relations to ensure accuracy and the protection of the victim or voluntary witnesses.

- c. Identifying the geographical area and provide a recommendation for the distribution of the alert.
 - d. The Director of Communications and Media Relations will then submit any written statements to legal counsel and the Police Commissioner or designee for approval.
- C. Notification Procedure
 1. When the appropriate conditions have been met, the Police Commissioner or designee will authorize the distribution of an alert.
 2. The Director of Communications and Media Relations will prepare a memo regarding the alert and share the memo and alert with the City of Cambridge's Communications Director, copying the City Manager, Deputy City Manager, City Public Information Officer, and Police Commissioner, who will then share the information with the Cambridge City Council prior to citywide or neighborhood distribution.
 3. The Director of Communications will then prepare the alert for distribution on Tip411, Nextdoor, prepare social media posts (as appropriate), post the alert on the Cambridge Police website, and then make timely notifications to the media.
 4. If appropriate, the Director of Communications Media Relations will update the City of Cambridge's Communications Director with any follow-up information.
- D. Responsibilities of the Director of Communications and Media Relations
 1. The Director of Communications and Media Relations will maintain accurate and up-to-date distribution databases.
 2. The Director will work in coordination with the Police Commissioner, the commander of the Investigations Unit, and/or Duty Chief to determine the geographic location, the time of day, the date, and any other pertinent factors to determine the correct distribution for an alert.
 - a. Delivery of Alerts
 - (1) Alerts will always be forwarded electronically to the City Manager, Deputy City Manager, Director of Communications, Public Information Officer, and the City Councilors.
 - (2) If/when appropriate, alerts will be electronically delivered to the following.
 - (i) MIT Police Department
 - (ii) Harvard University Police Department
 - (iii) Massachusetts State Police
 - (iv) MBTA Police
 - (v) The Director of the Women's Commission
 - (vi) Cambridge Housing Authority Security

- (vii) Public Information Officer for the Cambridge Public Schools
- (viii) Appropriate City of Cambridge Department Heads
- (ix) Community residents, businesses and community agencies in the affected area.

(3) Community alerts may be delivered electronically to residents living in the affected neighborhood.

b. Posting of Community Alerts

- (1) The Director of Communications and Media Relations will work with the City's Office of Community Relations to post written community alerts conspicuously throughout the affected neighborhoods, if appropriate. The alert may be posted in various locations including the following.
 - (i) Libraries
 - (ii) Laundromats
 - (iii) Variety Stores
 - (iv) Community Bulletin Boards
 - (v) Youth Centers
 - (vi) Schools
 - (vii) Churches

c. Telephone Alerts

- (1) Code Red or the Reverse 911 System may be activated to notify the affected neighborhood of criminal activity, as determined by the Police Commissioner.

3. Cambridge Police Department Community Alert Distribution

- a. The Director of Communications and Media Relations will distribute electronically the community alert to the appropriate units within the department.

4. Record Keeping and Follow-up

- a. A copy of the approved alert should be placed in the *Citizens Alerts* folder under the *PIO* folder on the S: drive.
- b. Approved alerts will also be published to the Cambridge Police website under *News and Alerts*.
- c. If appropriate, the Director of Communications and Media Relations will update the City of Cambridge's Communications Director with any follow-up information.