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Justice Limits Civil Action Discussions

Attorney General John N. Mitchell has revised the Justice Department's guidelines by forbidding employees from discussing with the press most aspects of civil as well as criminal cases.

In an order published in the Federal Register Nov. 3, Mitchell also revised the existing guidelines on what information may be released in criminal cases. Under the new rule, the ban on discussion with newsmen begins "from the time a person is the subject of a criminal investigation."

Previously, Justice Department personnel were forbidden from releasing information to the news media only after a person was arrested or indicted.

The original guidelines were promulgated after considerable study by former Attorney General Nicholas deB. Katzenbach.

Officials said the revisions were suggested to Mitchell by Judge Irving R. Kaufman of the Second U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New York City, who headed a judicial committee that adopted the guidelines.

The original guidelines were an attempt to assure greater protection of the right of an accused person to a fair trial.

Mitchell added a ban on offering "any opinion as to the accused's guilt, or the possibility of a plea of guilty to the offense charged, or the possibility of a plea to a lesser offense."