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Guidelines On Press Tightened

Decision

By Mitchell

WASHINGTON — (UPI) — Attorney General John N. Mitchell has revised the Justice Department's guidelines by forbidding employes 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.

Judge's Suggestion

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 2nd 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 by forbidding Justice Department personnel from:

- Telling the press anything that could influence the outcome of a trial.

- Disclosing any information, subject to specific limitations otherwise imposed, except the accused's name, age, residence, employment, marital status and similar background information; the substance of the charge or indictment; the identity of the arresting agency; scope of the investigation; and details of the arrest.

Background Bar

Background information of a highly prejudicial nature is banned as are details of a prior criminal record unless specifically requested by a reporter.

Personnel also are not to make any observations about a defendant's character; refer to statements, admissions, confessions, or alibis or the refusal of an accused to make a statement nor talk about such procedures as fingerprinting, lie detector, ballistic or laboratory tests.

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."

His new ban on civil actions forbids personnel from making any extrajudicial statements — other than a direct reference to public records — if there is a reasonable likelihood that dissemination in the press will interfere with a fair trial or if the statement refers to evidence, character, credibility, criminal records, tests, or opinions on the case.