

SUBJECT: LINE OF DEATH OR SERIOUS INJURY NOTIFICATION	SECTION: 103.16B
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PURPOSE

To establish standard guidelines and procedures that will serve the purpose of notifying family members of personnel who are either severely injured or have deceased while in the line of duty.

POLICY

It shall be the responsibility of the Fire Chief, or the Chief's designee to properly notify the next of kin of a firefighter who has suffered severe injuries or has died in the line of duty. The Fire Chief may designate a Family Liaison Officer to assist in making the notification and/or to inform the survivors.

All information given to the media will be by the Fire Chief or designated Public Information Officer.

PROCEDURE

The Fire Chief or designee will personally make the notification. The Fire Chief may also appoint a Family Liaison Officer to assist in informing the survivors. The notification team **MUST** familiarize themselves with the circumstances of the death and the personal data concerning the death, **BEFORE** making the notification. By having a second person in attendance, the Fire Chief will be able to leave shortly after to return to the scene if necessary. The second person shall remain to see what they can do for the surviving family, getting additional medical help for the survivors if needed, being a compassionate listener.

The name of the injured or deceased **MUST NEVER** be released by the Department before the immediate family is notified. **DO NOT** inform neighbor(s) of the death before telling the family. If asked, inform them you need to find the family regarding a medical emergency and ask if they know where the family can be found.

If there is knowledge of a medical problem with an immediate survivor, medical personnel should be available at the residence to coincide with the death notification.

Notification **MUST ALWAYS** be made in person and **NEVER ALONE**. Notification to the family will be done in dress uniform, if possible, and in a marked Fire Department vehicle. The Chief and the Family Liaison Officer should conduct the **OFFICIAL NOTIFICATION**. However, if the aforementioned persons are not readily accessible, notification should not be delayed until these people can be gathered. If there is an

opportunity to get to the hospital prior to the death of the personnel, DO NOT WAIT for the delegation to assemble. Attempt to bring the spouse to the hospital. The family should learn from the Department FIRST and not from the press or other sources.

NEVER make a death notification on the doorstep of the personnel's home. Ask to be admitted to the home. Ask the survivor if he/she would like to sit down. Inform family member slowly and clearly of the information that the Department has. If specifics of the incident are known, the Family Liaison Officer should relay as much information as possible to the family. Answer all questions honestly. Be sure to use the firefighter's first name during notification. If the firefighter has died, relay that information. NEVER give the family a false sense of hope. Use words such as "died" and "dead" rather than "gone away" or "passes away". Offer to make phone calls, if the survivor wishes.

DO NOT take any personal clothing, jewelry, billfold, purse, etc., to the notification.

If the member of the Department has been seriously injured and transported to the hospital, a Hospital Liaison should be established to coordinate activities between the Department, the family and the hospital.

If the family requests to visit the hospital, they should be transported in a marked Fire Department vehicle. It is highly recommended that the family NOT drive themselves to the hospital. If the family insists on driving, a uniformed firefighter should accompany them in the family vehicle.

If young children are at home, the Family Liaison Officer should arrange for babysitting needs. This may involve co-worker's spouses or friends known to the family, or other family members. Transportation of the children to a relative's home, or a similar arrangement, should be done in a Fire Department vehicle.

Prior to departing for the hospital, the Family Liaison Officer should notify the hospital staff and the Hospital Liaison (by telephone if possible) that a member(s) of the family is enroute to the hospital.

The deceased or severely injured firefighter's parents should also be afforded the courtesy of a personal notification if possible. Use a uniformed firefighter with a Department vehicle, if possible.

If immediate survivors live beyond the local area, the Family Liaison Officer will ensure that the appropriate jurisdiction is contacted requesting a personal notification.

The Chief or designee (and union official, if appropriate) should respond to the residence or the hospital to meet the family, as quick as possible.

In the event of an on-duty death, the external monitoring of fire frequencies may be extensive. Communications regarding notifications should be restricted to the telephone whenever possible. If the media has obtained the firefighter's name, they

must be instructed to withhold the firefighter's name pending notification of the next of kin. Personnel shall NOT give out any information of the incident. This will be done by the Chief or his designee.

In the event of a line-of-duty death, the Dispatcher will transmit a message prepared and/or approved by the Fire Chief similar to the following: ***"It is with deep regret that announcement is made of the death of (Rank, Name, Company) who lost his life in the line of duty while participating in operations on fire call (Number, Location, Date and Time)"***. Record it in the Department logbook.

If family members arrive on the scene during on-going operations it is IMPORTANT to IDENTIFY them and keep them out of the direct flow of operations, particularly if the body is still trapped or on the scene. (Control conversations in the area of the family). An Investigation Team should be assigned the scene of the area where the incident occurred should be secured. Secure all gear, equipment involved in the area. Photograph the total area and equipment.

Provide a debriefing and critique for personnel involved in the incident.

Assure notification of ALL off-duty and vacationing personnel.

REFERENCE

Firefighter Line-of-Duty Death Guidelines, State of Ohio Fire Marshal, April 2010.