

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

LINE-OF-DUTY DEATH

Purpose	37:1
Discussion	37:1
Definitions	37:1
Policy and Procedure.....	37:1
Death Notification	37:1
Assisting Survivors at the Hospital	37:2
Appointment of Agency Coordination Personnel	37:2
Agency Liaison	37:3
Funeral Liaison	37:3
Benefits Coordinator	37:4
Family Support Advocate.....	37:4

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LINE-OF-DUTY DEATH

I. PURPOSE

This policy is designed to prepare this Agency for the event of an active member's death in the line of duty and to direct the Agency in providing proper support for the deceased member's family.

II. DISCUSSION

This policy shall apply to all Sheriff's Office personnel. It is the policy of this Agency to provide liaison assistance to the immediate survivors of an active member who dies in the line of duty, and to provide tangible and emotional support during this traumatic period of readjustment for the surviving family.

III. DEFINITIONS

1. Line-of-Duty Death - The death of an active duty member by felonious or accidental means during the course of performing his/her assigned functions for the Monroe County Sheriff's Office.
2. Survivors - Immediate family members of the deceased member to include spouse, children, parents, siblings, fiancé and/or significant others.

IV. POLICY AND PROCEDURE

A. Death Notification

The following procedures should be adhered to in the case(s) of line-of-duty deaths and in case(s) of critically injured members with poor prognosis for survival. These procedures should be followed whenever possible with the understanding that the wishes of the family take precedence over the desires of the Agency. Members providing services and assistance to family members and survivors shall take all possible measures to accommodate their needs, wishes, and desires, but should not make promises to family members/survivors that they are not sure they can keep.

1. The name of the deceased member shall not be released to the media or other parties before immediate survivors living in the area are notified.
2. The Sheriff or Division / Site Commander will designate an officer to inform the immediate family of the member's condition or death. If not immediately available, the senior ranking member will make the appointment.
3. Notification of the immediate family should be made as soon as possible and, if possible, coincidental with command notifications.
4. Notification of survivors in the immediate area shall be made in person and, whenever appropriate, with another person such as a clergy member. Whenever the health of immediate survivors is a concern, emergency medical services personnel shall be requested to inconspicuously stand by during the notification.
5. If the opportunity to get the family to the hospital prior to the member's death exists, notification officers shall advise the hospital / an Agency member there that the family is on their way. In such cases, immediate transportation should be provided for survivors rather than waiting for any other members of the departmental delegation to arrive. If the member has died, notification should be to the survivors in as forthright and empathetic manner as possible.

6. Communication of information concerning the member and the incident shall, whenever possible, be restricted to land-line telephone to avoid interception by the media or others. Should the media obtain the member's name prematurely, the senior member should request that the information be withheld until proper notification of survivors can be made.
7. The notification member shall be responsible for identification of additional survivors outside the area and shall make any notifications as desired by the immediate family. Such notifications shall be made by contacting the law enforcement agency in that jurisdiction and requesting that a personal notification be made.
8. The notification officer shall submit a written report to the Sheriff specifying the identity, time and place of survivors notified.

B. Assisting Survivors at the Hospital

Whenever possible, the Sheriff shall join the family at the hospital in order to emphasize the Agency's support. The next-highest ranking member to arrive at the hospital shall serve as or designate a hospital liaison officer who shall be responsible for coordinating the arrival of immediate survivors, departmental personnel, the media, and others, and who shall assume the following responsibilities.

1. Arrange for waiting families, for immediate survivors and a press staging area. The desires of the surviving family members should be followed with regard to their accessibility to other members and friends.
2. Ensure that medical personnel provide pertinent medical information on the member's condition to the family before any other parties.
3. Assist family members, in accordance with their desires, in gaining access to the injured or deceased member.
4. Provide hospital personnel with all necessary information on billing for medical services. The liaison officer should ensure that all medical bills are directed to the appropriate authority and that they are not forwarded to the member's family or other survivors.
5. Arrange transportation for the family and other survivors upon their departure from the hospital.
6. Ensure that immediate family members are provided with appropriate assistance at the hospital.

C. Appointment of Agency Coordination Personnel

The designated Agency member(s) shall begin serving in the following capacities: Agency liaison, funeral liaison, benefits coordinator, and family support advocate. These assignments will be made in writing to departmental personnel and the surviving family members will be informed of those designated. In addition the Sheriff or Sheriff's designee will do all of the following:

1. Make additional personnel assignments to assist in handling incoming phone calls and inquiries, and to direct the public to appropriate personnel.
2. Ensure that the Employee Assistance Program is implemented to assist surviving family members and emphasize the family's right to psychological services.
3. Ensure that other members are provided the opportunity to participate in critical incident stress debriefings.

D. Agency Liaison

The Agency liaison officer will serve as a facilitator between the family and the Agency. This individual will normally be a commanding officer in order to expedite the tasks of employing Agency resources and the delegation of assignments. This member will work closely with the funeral liaison to ensure that the needs and requests of the family are fulfilled. This includes, but is not necessarily limited to, the following:

1. Notifying the 100 Club, which may provide immediate assistance to the family.
2. Overseeing provision of travel and lodging arrangements for out-of-town family members.
3. Identifying alternative churches and/or halls that will accommodate a law enforcement funeral. These alternatives will be presented to the family, who will make the final decision, and who may select one of the alternatives or another location they prefer, in which case the Agency will continue to provide all services discussed herein.
4. Coordinating all official law enforcement notifications and arrangements to include Honor Guard, pallbearers, traffic control, and liaison with visiting law enforcement agencies, all according / subject to the family's wishes.
5. Assisting family members in dealing with general media inquiries and informing them of limitations on what they can specifically say to the media.
6. Providing liaison with the media to include coordination of any statements and press conferences. The Agency liaison shall also ensure that members of the Agency are aware of restrictions regarding release of any information that might undermine future legal proceedings.
7. Ensuring that security checks of the survivors' local residence(s) are initiated immediately following the incident and continued for as long as necessary thereafter.

E. Funeral Liaison

The funeral liaison acts as facilitator between the decedent member's family and the Agency during the wake and funeral. The funeral liaison officer is responsible for:

1. Meeting with the family members and explaining his/her responsibilities to them.
2. Being available to the family prior to and throughout the wake and funeral.
3. Ensuring that the needs and wishes of the family come before those of the Agency.
4. Assisting the family in working with the funeral director regarding arrangements.
5. Relaying any information to the family concerning the circumstances of the decedent member's death and appropriate information regarding any investigation.
6. Determining the need for travel arrangements for out-of-town family members and any other special needs of the family during the funeral and reporting his information to the Agency liaison, if the funeral is held locally and if the family desires the Agency's presence at the funeral.
7. Determining the need for travel arrangements for Agency representatives and reporting this information to the Agency liaison, if the funeral is to be held locally and if the family desires the Agency's presence at the funeral.

8. Briefing the family members on the procedures involved in a law enforcement funeral, if they desire one.

F. Benefits Coordinator

The benefits coordinator is responsible for:

1. Filing Workers' Compensation claims and related paperwork.
2. Presenting information on all benefits to the family.
3. Documenting inquiries and interest in public donations to the family, and establishing a mechanism for receipt of such contributions, as appropriate.
4. Preparing all documentation of benefits and payments due survivors to include the nature and amount of benefits to be received by each beneficiary, the schedule of payments, and the name of a contact person or facilitator at each benefit or payment office.
5. Filing all benefits paperwork and maintaining contact with the family in order to ensure that benefits are being received. A copy of benefits documentation should be provided to all survivors affected and explained to each of them.
6. Advising the surviving family of the role of law enforcement associations and organizations and the nature of any support programs that they sponsor for law enforcement survivors.

G. Family Support Advocate

The family support advocate serves as a long-term liaison and support function for the surviving family. The duties of this individual include:

1. Providing contact with surviving family members in order to keep them abreast of criminal proceedings relating to the death of their family member.
2. Accompanying surviving family members to criminal proceedings if they wish to attend, and explaining the nature of the proceedings and introducing them to prosecutors and other people as required.
3. Identifying all support services available to family members and working on their behalf to secure any services necessary.
4. Maintaining routine contact with family members to provide companionship and emotional support, and maintaining an ongoing relationship between the Agency and the immediate family.
5. Relaying the concerns and needs of the family to those individuals or organizations that may provide assistance, and encouraging others to visit and help as necessary if the family so wishes.