


Old Saybrook Department of Police Services



General Order - 5.30



Notifications: Death, Injury, Illness	Issued By: Michael A. Spera, Chief of Police
Classification: Unclassified	Signed: 
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CALEA:	

Policy

It is the policy of the Old Saybrook Department of Police Services to provide guidelines and procedures to ensure timely notification of the nearest relative of a deceased, seriously injured, or seriously ill person.

Purpose

Notifications are difficult and emotional assignments, distressing for both the recipient and the officer. Furthermore, these notifications represent, for the surviving family or household members, the first information about a loss likely to be both traumatic and a life changing event. Planned, thoughtful and caring delivery of information provides a supportive and respectful basis upon which the recipient may begin the grievance process.

Definitions

Next-of-Kin: For purposes of this policy, the closest relative of the deceased, seriously injured or ill person; for example, spouse, parents, siblings, significant other and adult children.

Notification Team: Comprised of at least a Department supervisor and one sworn police officer. Additional resources, including clergy, a relative or other known person may be utilized.

Procedure

A. Collecting Information

1. Prior to making any notification, as much information as it is reasonably possible relating to identity and event shall be obtained. This information includes but is not limited to the following:
 - a. Name and demographic information of the deceased or injured person.
 - b. Relationship to the person to be notified.
 - c. If the deceased or injured person has been positively identified or if further identification by next-of-kin is required.
 - d. Nature of cause of death or injury.
 - e. When and where the death or injury occurred.

- f. Where the deceased body or injured person and their personal effects are currently located.
 - g. If the deceased body will fall under the jurisdiction of the medical examiner or may be released.
 - h. Point of contact information for the person making the request for notification.
 - i. If a translator may be required for effective communication with next-of-kin.
2. If an outside agency is requesting the notification, point of contact information should be independently verified prior to making contact for the notification.
3. The most immediate relative, starting with the spouse and followed by any other immediate adult family member, over the age of eighteen years old, should be the first to have knowledge of the death, serious injury or illness outside of any persons who were involved at the scene of the incident.
4. If the immediate relative is unavailable and there will be some delay in making personal contact, determine who the next closest relative would be. Other relatives should be contacted only when substantial delays would be required to make contact with the next-of-kin.
 - a. Avoid leaving a business card, note or message with neighbors.
 - b. The on-duty Shift Supervisor shall be responsible for coordinating response until the notification is properly made.
5. When the next-of-kin are located in another state or local jurisdiction, the Shift Supervisor should contact the appropriate law enforcement agency and request that they conduct the notification in person and provide timely verification when the notification has been completed.
6. Police radio communications including information concerning the specific identity of the deceased, seriously injured or ill person, should be avoided.
7. Notification to next-of-kin should be delivered promptly, during or as soon after the event or outside agency request, as practicable.
8. The name of the victim shall not be released to the media or other outside sources until the next-of-kin is notified.

A. Notification

1. The address of the next-of-kin shall be verified.
2. The notification team should identify themselves by name, rank and Department and request permission to enter the home to have a private conversation.
3. The relationship of the survivor to the deceased or seriously injured or ill person shall be verified.
4. Before beginning the notification, determine whether other adult members of the immediate family are home. If so, they should all be brought together and told at once so

the officer will not need to repeat the notification and to spare the family members present the task of doing this. It is preferred that young children and elderly family members be excused to allow their family members to deliver the information at a later time.

5. When delivering the notification, it is important to use plain language in a straightforward manner. The language should be clear and simple. Graphic details regarding the cause of death or injury should not be immediately discussed.
 - a. It is best to refer to the deceased, seriously injured or ill person by first name or by the relationship to the next-of-kin.
 - b. In the case of death, the word “died” is very important and should be repeated.
 - c. The notification statement should be prepared and simple, for example, “We are here to advise you that John has died in a motor vehicle collision.”
 - d. Terms such as “passed away,” “no longer with us,” or “they are in a better place” should be avoided.
 - e. Terms such as “body”, “corpse”, “deceased”, or “victim” may be regarded as callous or uncaring by the family members.
 - f. Police jargon and personal loss disclosures should be avoided.
 - g. Avoid advising the next-of-kin that you know it is hard or know how they feel.
 - h. “I’m sorry for your loss” is an appropriate response to most reactions.
6. The next-of-kin should be advised to make a list of questions that arise that will be handled during a follow-up when more facts are known.
7. Unless on scene identification is necessary, next-of-kin or family members should not be respond to or be escorted to a crime scene or the scene of a motor vehicle collision.
8. Family members should be informed that they may need to be interviewed at a later time but if it is imperative that they be questioned immediately after notification, questioning should be conducted compassionately.
9. The notification team shall provide their business cards and contact information following notification prior to departure.
10. An effort shall be made not to leave the survivor alone following notification. You may ask the survivor if you could call anyone for them, such as clergy, a family friend or neighbor.
11. If the death or serious injury involves the immediate family of or a school aged child, a school administrator of the school that the child attends should be contacted.

B. Potential Reactions

1. The notification team should be prepared for any type of reaction to the notification which may include but is not limited to;
 - a. Anger, hysteria, and hostility towards the notification team.
 - b. Medical emergency precipitated by the notification.
2. “I’m sorry for your loss.” is an appropriate response to most reactions.
 - a. It is important to remain calm and respectful.

3. Officer Safety considerations shall not be disregarded, however, it is important to give a grieving family member time and distance to allow de-escalation.

C. Follow-up, Referrals, and Property

1. The notification team should be prepared to answer questions and assist as requested with general information regarding contacting a funeral service but not recommend one service over another.
 - a. Discussions regarding life insurance, social security benefits, and probate shall be avoided.
 - b. Questions pertaining to organ or tissue donation should be referred to hospital staff or a family physician.
2. When the deceased, injured, or ill person is located in another state or local jurisdiction, the next-of-kin will be provided with all point of contact information for the appropriate agency that initially requested the notification.
 - a. Following notification, or in the presence of the next-of-kin, if requested, the point of contact for the outside agency shall be contacted to verify that the notification was made.
3. Property in the possession of the deceased at the time of death should not be turned over to the family at the time of notification.
 - a. Arrangements should be made for next-of-kin to obtain the property of the deceased in a dignified manner carefully accounting for all property passing through the care and custody of the police department.
 - b. The notification team should inquire about the need to secure any property of the deceased in the absence of a family member taking responsibility for the property.
 - c. All reasonable efforts shall be made to secure the deceased or seriously injured persons residence or related property.
 - d. Property that is later returned to the next-of-kin shall be presented in an appropriated, organized manner. Evidence bags, garbage bags, and similar containers shall be avoided.

Revision History:

Replaces: Regulation 57.0 Dead Bodies