



Jackson Hole Fire/EMS Operations Manual

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure standards and guidelines for notification, communication and activities in the event that there is a death or serious injury during line of duty operations.

At all times the wishes and desires of the family will take precedence over the wishes of Jackson Hole Fire/EMS.

SECTION I: The First 24 Hours

1. Notification

- Assign a two-person team to notify the firefighter's family, in person, before releasing any information.
- Notify all on- and off-duty fire department personnel, including the Chaplain.
- Notify elected officials of the death.
- Notify Wyoming Workers Compensation (307) 777-8650
- Notify Wyoming Occupational Safety & Health Administration (307) 777-7786
- Notify all other fire chiefs in the jurisdiction and the State Fire Marshal.
- Notify the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation LODD hotline (1-888-736-5868).
- Notify the U.S. Department of Justice Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program Office (1-888-744-6513). See "Report of Public Safety Officer's Death".
- Notify the U.S Fire Administration (1-301-447-1836).

2. Family Support

- Designate a family support liaison (team) and offer to stay with the family around the clock.
- Designate a hospital liaison, if appropriate.
- Meet with the family and explain the support your fire department can provide and ask if they have any immediate needs.
- Be prepared to explain why an autopsy may be required.
- Collect the deceased firefighter's personal/department belongings to give to the family later. Inventory and document in the presence of a witness. If some belongings will be held during investigation, explain this to the family.

3. Department Support

- Collect, bag, tag and secure the firefighter's PPE, including SCBA, and full turn out ensemble as soon as possible for the investigation team.

- Monitor department members closest to the incident to see how they are dealing with the loss.

SECTION II: After the Funeral

1. Family Support

- Continue to invite the family to department events and activities.
- Provide assistance with routine tasks (home maintenance, running errands, etc).
- Assign someone to assist the family in accessing all benefits for which they are eligible.
- Offer to “be there” at special times/events (children’s activities, holidays, etc.)

2. Department Support

- Assist department members in accessing additional support, as needed.
- If local resources are not available, contact the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation at 1-301-447-1365.

3. Memorials and Tributes

- Inform and include the family in local, state, and national tributes to the firefighter.
- Make the family aware of the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation and its support programs for fire service survivors. Visit: www.firehero.org.
- Plan to attend the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend and to send an escort and honor guard unit for the family.

SECTION III: Next of Kin Notification

The importance of the NEXT OF KIN NOTIFICATION cannot be over-emphasized. This process will set the tone for many difficult days, weeks, months, and years for the surviving family. Sensitivity and compassion are imperative.

Due to the fact that many times our Team will not be able to assemble immediately, the notification process must be accomplished by the affected fire department and Chief.

Family notification should be made as quickly as possible to avoid the family receiving a notification from another outside party. The media will employ many efforts to seek out the name of the fallen firefighter. We must use all necessary measures to protect the next of kin from unwanted media exposure.

For this reason, the Notification Team will need to assemble rapidly. The team should be at least two and preferably three individuals with individual vehicles. It is recommended that the notification team should be comprised the following members:

1. The Chief or Acting Chief. However, if unavailable the highest ranking available Officer.
2. Family Liaison Officer – Reference Personal Confidential Form for assistance in this designation. May be selected by the Chief
3. Fire Department Chaplain

If the notification team cannot be readily assembled, notification should not be delayed. This decision will be made by the Chief or Acting Chief.

If the fallen firefighter's family resides far enough out of the area as to make the department's participation in the notification impractical, the local Fire agency in the area should be notified to make a timely notification.

Another distinct possibility is that the affected Department could experience a loss of more than one member. This would require multiple notification teams to be assembled and deployed.

Before you arrive at the residence, verify latest information, and decide who will speak, and what that person will say.

A word of warning, the family may strike out and blame the Department for their loss. For this reason, the initial notification and how we handle it is extremely important.

Steps to be taken at the residence:

1. It may become necessary to have EMT's standby if the people receiving the news are medically vulnerable. If this is done, have the apparatus standby near the residence, but not in view.
2. At the door identify yourself and ask to come in. (Notification should take place in a private setting not at the doorstep.)
3. When inside, ensure you are notifying the right person.
4. Get people in a comfortable or relaxed setting: the most important function of the person making the notification is to put all of the known basic facts into one sentence and tell them.
5. Make sure your message is absolutely clear and direct.
6. Begin with, "I have very bad news" or "I'm very sorry to tell you".
7. Let them know how it happened, "Bob died responding to a fire," or "Bob was killed in a building collapse." Always try to use the deceased member's first name. Never give the family a false sense of hope. If the member has died, relay that information. Use words like "dead" and "died" rather than "gone away" or "passed away".
8. Allow the family to express their emotions. Do not try to talk them out of their grief.
9. This is a very sad time. Do not mask your own grief.
10. Provide only the facts you know, never speculate. If you cannot answer a question, find out the correct answer.
11. Phrases or words to avoid:
 - a. "I know how you feel."
 - b. "It was God's will."
 - c. "Life will go on."
 - d. "He would have wanted to go this way."
 - e. "Be brave."
 - f. "Passed away."
12. Use the victim's first name when referring to our firefighter.

13. Ask if the Department can assist by notifying immediate family members (parents, brothers, and sisters).
14. With the permission of the next of kin, the Department can help setup a support system:
 - Clergy
 - Relatives
 - Friends
15. Never leave immediately after making a notification.
16. Do not leave people without a support system. Wait for others to arrive.
17. Do not take the victim's personal items with you.
18. Ask the survivor(s) if they wish to see the deceased firefighter, even if the body is badly disfigured. People often have a need to see, touch and hold the deceased; otherwise they may be in denial. This is often very helpful in the family's grief process. It gives a sense of finality.
19. If family members wish to see the firefighter, arrangements need to be made rapidly for the viewing. Sensitivity to the family is very important. Provide the best possible environment and avoid delays that heighten the family's anxiety.
20. Offer to transport the family to the location of the firefighter, and help prepare them for what they will see.
21. Do not let them drive.
22. If you transport the family, turn off your radio and/or advise dispatch that you are transporting the relatives and, if possible, switch to an alternate channel, or communicate by cell phone. Before transporting the family try to contact hospital personnel by phone that the family will be enroute.
23. The Family Liaison Officer and Chaplain should stay with the family unless the family declines. The FLO should make arrangements as soon as practical to speak directly with the Planning Group Manager to ensure timely and accurate information back to the PGM and LODD team. At some point, it is important that the FLO reports back, in person, to the PGM and LODD team command post.
24. Ask if the Department can pick up any children who may be away at this time.
25. Ask if there is a need to arrange for immediate babysitting needs for young children. Make arrangements if needed.
26. Surviving parents will also be afforded the courtesy of personal notification if they live in the same geographical area. If the deceased member was married, notification will be at the request of the deceased employee's spouse. In this case, the parents' notification team will be a department representative designated by the Chief and one of the other Department Chaplains (or parents' Clergy) if possible.

27. Advise the family of possible media calls. Unwanted media exposure will only add to the difficulty of this tragedy. Suggest that a friend of the family screens their incoming calls.
28. Assure the family that their wishes are the Department's number one concern.
29. Advise the family that an autopsy is not required but is recommended.
30. Ensure that the family understands that they do not have to make any immediate decisions regarding services, mortuary, wills, etc.
31. Before leaving the residence, try to set a time for a Family Planning Meeting. There are decisions that will need to be made by the family that will shape the planning process. This meeting should take place within the first 24 hours.

SECTION V: Emergency Contact Information

All members **Shall** complete the Designation of Beneficiaries Form for U.S Department of Justice Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program Form and the Jackson Hole Fire/EMS Emergency Contact Information Form as part of their initial department orientation. **These forms Shall Be Updated Annually** at the All Department Meeting and will be stored in each member's personal file. See Division 7- Reports and Forms to access these forms.

These forms shall be confidential and only accessed by the Fire Chief and Duty Officer serving Jackson Hole Fire/EMS

APPENDIX A: "In Person, In Time" Recommended Procedures for Death Notification

SECTION IV: Line of Duty Death Flow Chart

