

Title: Line-of-Duty Death or Serious Injury
Notification

_____ Fire Chief

Corpus Christi Fire Department
Standard Operating Procedures

No. 100.20

Date: March 15, 2001

PURPOSE

This procedure describes the activities, roles and responsibilities required in the event an employee is seriously injured or killed in the line-of-duty. It establishes a priority and procedure for conducting notifications, guidelines for dealing with family members, the news media, and provides a funeral protocol.

The overriding philosophy of the Corpus Christi Fire Department is that the first priority following a serious injury or line-of-duty death – after caring for the victims – is the swift and compassionate notification of the injured or deceased member's family and the extension of assistance and support to them.

DEFINITIONS

Serious Injury – any injury sustained in the line-of-duty which is, or may become, life threatening or will disable the employee for a substantial period.

Line-of-duty Death - The death of any member of the Corpus Christi Fire Department while on duty, or while undergoing medical treatment for any injury or disease resulting from such duty, is considered a line-of-duty death. This also includes the death of a fire department member while traveling in connection with such duty.

PROCEDURE

This procedure defines the procedures to be followed in the event of a serious injury or death sustained in the line of duty. It can be escalated in the event of multiple deaths or serious injuries.

ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

Initial Responsibilities

Immediately upon becoming aware that an employee has been seriously injured or killed in the line-of-duty, the District Chief should notify the Shift Commander. The Shift Commander becomes the initial point of contact and will coordinate with the Fire Chief.

If the Employee Has Been Seriously Injured

The Shift Commander will assign a Hospital Liaison Officer. The notification procedures are identical to those for a deceased firefighter with the exception that the notification team will offer to drive the family to the treating hospital.

If the Employee has died

Shift Commander Responsibilities

In the event of a Line-of-duty death, the on-duty Assistant Chief shall:

- Notify the Fire Chief, the Operations Chief, Department Safety Officer, and all off-duty Chief Officers.
- Secure the scene of the incident with the assistance of Fire Prevention and Police Department personnel.
- Direct the PIO (if on scene) and Dispatch to withhold release of personal data relating to the employee or the death, pending notification of next of kin.
- Begin to gather all available information concerning the incident and circumstances leading to the death.
- Assign an Auditing Officer, as soon as possible, to secure the personal effects of the deceased and deliver them to Fire Administration.
- If applicable, assign a Hospital Liaison Officer(s) to go to the receiving hospital(s) where the injured firefighter(s) are sent.
- Document all actions, contacts, requests and other pertinent data. This information is to be provided to the Fire Chief or his designee upon their request.
- Preserve any equipment, clothing and breathing apparatus used by injured or deceased firefighters for the investigation.
- Preserve all tactical worksheets, video and/or audiotapes for the investigation.

Fire Chief or his designee:

Once notified, the Fire Chief or his designee shall notify:

- City Manager, who will notify the Mayor and City Council members
- Risk Manager
- City Attorney
- Any other appropriate parties.

Other responsibilities:

- Assign personnel from Fire Administration to retrieve the confidential Employee Notification Packet, if completed. If the Employee Notification Packet was not completed, assemble as much personal data as possible concerning the deceased. Particular information needed includes: Name, Date of Birth, File Photo, Social Security Number, Marital Status, Dependents and Name(s) and Address(s) of next of kin. This information must be made available to the Notification Officer as soon as possible.
- Ensure that the Shift Commander has assigned an Auditing Officer and Hospital Liaison Officer.
- Assign a Notification Team consisting of two people. In case of multiple deaths or injuries, one Notification Team per surviving family should be assigned. He/she should make the notification personally if at all possible, or assign a Notification Officer and either another Chief Officer or the person listed in the Employee Notification Packet, if readily available, to accompany him to make the notification.
- Assign a Survivor Action Officer, preferably the Notification Officer would also assume this role.
- Assign a Family Liaison Officer, or one per surviving family.

The Fire Chief or First Assistant Chief may choose to hold daily briefings in order to communicate activities of all assigned officers.

Auditing Officer - ensures the security and proper disposition of the personal effects of a member in case of his/her death. Personal effects shall include all property owned by the deceased member that is kept fire department property at the time of the member's death.

Responsibilities - in the event of the death of a member, whether on or off duty, the following steps shall be followed in the gathering and disposition of his/her personal effects:

The Auditing Officer will be assigned to secure the personal effects of the deceased member and deliver them to Fire Administration. All items will be kept in a secure location. The deceased member's vehicle will be secured at the work site and the keys forwarded with the personal effects. The First Assistant Chief or his designee will conduct an inventory of the personal effects upon receipt and make a written report of all items. The next of kin will be given priority consideration regarding receipt of personal property. Care should be exercised in selecting a tactful time for delivery of the personal effects to the next of kin. Documentation is required indicating the date, time and location of disposition. The name and the relationship of the individual accepting the property will also be noted. Documentation should be forwarded to the Fire Chief's office for placement in the deceased members' personnel file.

Hospital Liaison Officer(s) - goes directly to the receiving hospital(s) and maintains a liaison with the hospital staff, PIO's, Fire Administration and the Incident Commander via telephone.

Responsibilities - until relieved:

1. Update Incident Command of any significant information relating to the patient's condition.
2. Assure that no press releases are made.
3. Assure blood gases are drawn as soon as possible. (Note: Refer to Notification Section of this policy concerning disposition of blood gases in U.S. Department of Justice Section).
4. Collect all personal articles of the firefighter, should pronouncement of his/her death occur.

Notification Officer(s) - The Fire Chief is responsible for the notification of the next of kin. The Fire Chief will make the specific assignment of this duty. Two (2) official designees of the Fire Department shall make notification through personal contact, if possible. The Notification Team will consist of at least one (1) Chief Officer and either another Chief Officer, or the person named in the Employee Notification Packet if that person is readily available. While selecting the ideal team is desirable, prompt and judicious notification of the next of kin is the utmost importance in the case of a line-of-duty death. The official notification serves to assure the next of kin of the validity of the information and to provide a knowledgeable source of information concerning the death. The goal for family notification is within two hours of the death for those residing within Nueces County and the immediate area. If the deceased firefighter's next of kin are not local, arrangements must be made to facilitate notification. If a point of contact is not known nor listed in the Employee Notification Packet, the fire department in the family's hometown would be the best choice to make the notification and then notify the on-duty Shift Commander. Someone must be available to receive the call that the notification has been made. The Fire Chief would then dispatch a two-person team to travel to the employee's hometown to meet with the family.

Responsibilities:

The Notification Officer is responsible for making contact with the next of kin. This shall be done in person whenever possible. This official notification must be made before any details of a death are released to the news media. The Notification Officer should be prepared to assist the next of kin with the immediate emotional trauma associated with the notification. The Fire Department Chaplain, a friend of the family or a clergy member may be of valuable assistance at this time. The Notification Officer should be prepared to stay with the next of kin until a family member or friend arrives, or as long as requested.

The Notification Officer shall:

1. Wear a dress uniform if at all possible.
2. Have an official Corpus Christi Fire Department ID Card in their possession.
3. Familiarize themselves with the circumstances of the death and the personal data concerning the deceased before making the notification. (Contact Fire Chief or his designee.)
4. Determine if the family has a particular person, specifically a close family member and/or department member, to act as Family Liaison Officer.
5. Once notification has been made, the Notification Officer will advise the Fire Chief or his designee, the Incident Commander, and the Dispatch Supervisor.

An official announcement may then be made and details may be released to the news media. The Dispatch Supervisor should receive the official press release from the Fire Chief or his designee in writing. (Use FAX if necessary).

Survivor Action Officer:

The Fire Chief will appoint a Survivor Action Officer to work in conjunction with a union designee, (if appropriate) in providing liaison with the next of kin. To provide a sense of continuity and familiarity for the surviving family, it may be advantageous in some cases for the Notification Officer to assume the duties of the Survivor Action Officer. The Survivor Action Officer is a special staff assignment. As a direct designee of the Fire Chief, the Survivor Action Officer will receive the full cooperation of the entire Fire Department. The Survivor Action Officer will report directly to the Fire Chief or his designee.

The Survivor Action Officer is responsible for the management of several important activities. The principal concern is the ongoing welfare of the next of kin. The Survivor Action Officer will render whatever assistance is necessary to settle the personal affairs of the deceased member and assist the next of kin and immediate family through the crisis. In incidents involving multiple deaths, one (1) Survivor Action Officer shall be assigned per family.

The Survivor Action Officer should form a committee consisting of a number of personnel assigned to handle specific aspects of the funeral arrangements and to assist the surviving family. This committee should be formed as soon as possible after the death to begin operations. This is of particular importance when operating during weekends or holidays.

In all cases, the level of Fire Department participation with the funeral arrangements will be at the discretion of the surviving family. In incidents involving multiple deaths, planning funeral arrangements between the surviving families may require the assignment of more than one officer.

Family Liaison Officer:

On-call to the surviving family, or families, 24 hours a day as a logistical contact. Provides transportation for the family and maintains constant communication with the Survivor Action Officer. An ideal person for this assignment is a departmental friend of the deceased. He/she will be under the direction of the Survivor Action Officer.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Following notification of the next or kin, an announcement will be made informing all members of the line-of-duty death.

Example:

The Fire Chief regrets to announce the death of (rank), (Name) who died in the line of duty. A brief description of the circumstances will follow.

Immediately after the announcement the Fire Chief will issue the "Memorial Orders," which may include: all flags on Fire Stations and other departmental facilities lowered to half-mast and all badges to be shrouded. Flags will remain at half-mast until the day following the funeral and badge shrouds will be worn for 30 days after the funeral.

FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS

Survivor Action Committee - under the direction of the Survivor Action Officer, provides coordination and interaction with:

1. The Funeral Home Director
2. The Minister and church to arrange the funeral service
3. The agency responsible for the cemetery.
 - A. When meeting with the family and minister for the funeral home and church selection, keep in mind such things as parking and church capacity. Expect over 1,000 people to attend. The family minister will know the capabilities of the church. If it is too small he/she should have little trouble gaining access to a larger one.
 - B. When dealing with the Funeral Home Director, take a strong position initially. They may be overwhelmed with the magnitude of people who will be involved. Use their expertise, but take control and maintain it.

Procession Officer - arranges and directs the funeral procession.

- Contact P.D. Traffic Division as soon as the church and cemetery are confirmed. Procession Officer will set the procession route. If the route should cross R.R. tracks, it will be a good idea to contact them to withhold train traffic.
- The Procession Officer and the Shift Commander need to determine which companies will standby along the route. Maps should be prepared and given to respective companies and the Dispatch Center that include directions, placements and times. P.D. Officers escorting the procession should be provided with the same information.
- Select someone to be in charge of a detail of 6 to 8 personnel to coordinate the procession lineup and parking lot exiting. Give them portable radios for communication during the procession. Contact Communications Technician to provide needed radios. The procession plan should be committed to paper and provided to each member of the detail. Provide the parking lot detail with a van and they will be the last vehicle in the procession. They can give updates and location reports while the procession is underway.
- Get a map of the cemetery to determine the routing through it. The larger apparatus may not be able to negotiate some turns in the older sections. Do this the day before. (Funeral directors have copies of these maps).
- Have the P.D. escort and parking lot detail meet at the church 90 minutes before the start of the services. Out of town trucks and people will be arriving early.
- Call RTA to acquire buses for the procession. Have them meet at a point to be determined to provide transportation for individuals wishing to attend but using private vehicles. The Union may be instrumental in coordinating transportation for out of town visitors.

Resource Manager - provides necessary support functions.

- Select the number of trucks and cars that will be needed to transport the deceased, pallbearers, City Officials, Chiefs, Union Officials, etc.
- Have a new pair of stenciled turnouts made to be presented to the family member.
- Contact Fire Maintenance to prepare the truck. (Removal of handrails, hose, bed dividers, cleaning and decorating, etc.). Off duty personnel and family may be able to assist in the decorating.
- If it is raining, or it appears it might start to rain, have contingency plans for emergency car wash. This includes staff cars and vehicles used for pallbearers, parking lot detail, etc. Check with Training Division to see if we may have recruits to stand by if necessary.

Honor Guard Commander - assists with activities of the pallbearers, honorary pallbearers and ushers.

- The Pallbearers for a line-of-duty death will be eight members of the Fire Department. The family may request certain individuals to act as pallbearers. In the absence of such a request, the Survivor Action Officer will appoint a friend of the deceased to form the party of pallbearers with the Funeral Director and Union Officer.
- Pallbearers/ushers shall be in dress uniform to include tie, badge shroud and white gloves.
- Conduct a meeting with the pallbearers (also honorary) the day before the funeral. Establish all procedures at that time (where to stand, when to move, flag placement, etc.). A good place to meet would be at the funeral home (when no visitation is occurring). Arrange with the funeral director to allow the pallbearers to practice handling an empty casket. A casket with a 200-lb. firefighter in it can weigh upwards of 500 lbs. Make arrangements for this meeting on the first contact with the funeral director. The honorary pallbearers will be needed to assist with loading and unloading the casket from the apparatus. This needs to be rehearsed beforehand.
- The ushers to be used for the church services and visitation will be ten Fire Department members. In the absence of family requests for specific individuals to act as ushers, the Survivor Action Officer will appoint a friend of the deceased to form the party of ushers. He will work with the Funeral Director and the Honor Guard Commander.
- Conduct an instructional meeting with the ushers before the visitation and the funeral. It might be wise to conduct this meeting after and before the one with the pallbearers, as the Funeral Director will have valuable input in this area.
- Have the ushers at the church services instructed, in place (with white gloves) and ready to seat people a minimum of one hour before the start of the services. People will be arriving early.

FUNERAL PROCESSION UNIFORM

Members attending the funeral in uniform shall be in dress uniform to include badge shroud. Members assigned to apparatus stationed along the procession route shall be in dress uniform to include badge shroud. They will take a position near the apparatus and maintain an orderly, visible and respectful formation until the ENTIRE processional has passed their position. The First Assistant Chief will coordinate with the surrounding cities to provide cover companies at our fire stations during the funeral. The Fire Chief may receive several offers, all offers should be directed to the First Assistant Chief.

EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION INFORMATION

The Emergency Notification Form is a confidential record, completed by members of the Department. The form provides the CCFD with emergency numbers and other information for accidents involving a member of the Department, and will remain confidential for all other

purposes. Each employee will be asked to complete a form at the time of original employment with the Department. Updates to the information may also be made at any time by sending the revised information to Fire Headquarters. The packet will be updated annually. Specific instructions are included in each Packet.

INVESTIGATION – See Line-of-duty Death or Injury Investigation policy.

CLASSIFICATIONS OF SERVICE

The Corpus Christi Fire Department will offer three (3) classifications of services. The Honor Guard Commander will meet with the family and offer the appropriate services to them. The family may choose any or all of the services for the classification. Once again, the level of participation is at the discretion of the surviving family and the Fire Chief. The classifications are as follows:

1. Full Honors. This is reserved for line-of-duty deaths only.
 - A. Chapel Service
 - Casket Guard – during viewing and funeral services.
 - Services of CCFD Chaplain.
 - Funeral Coach/Apparatus.
 - Color Guard
 - Honor Guard
 - Bagpipers/Drummers/Soloist
 - B. Graveside Service
 - Above services continued.
 - CCFD graveside ceremony/farewell to include: flag-folding/presentation. Bible presentation.
 - Bugler.
 - Arched Aerial Ladders at the entrance to the cemetery if in the Corpus Christi Metropolitan area.
 - Fire Walk of Honor

All CCFD uniformed members attending full honor services, whether on or off duty, shall be in Class A uniform.

2. Active Firefighter (not in the line-of-duty) will normally include:
 - A. Chapel Service
 - Casket Guard – during viewing and funeral services.
 - Services of CCFD Chaplain.
 - Funeral Coach/Apparatus.
 - Color Guard
 - Honor Guard
 - Bagpipers/Drummers/Soloist
 - B. Graveside Service
 - Above services continued.
 - CCFD graveside ceremony/farewell to include: flag-folding/presentation (if member is eligible.)
 - Bible presentation.
 - Bugler

CCFD uniformed members attending active member services, whether on or off duty, may wear Class A uniform or appropriate civilian attire.

3. Retired Firefighter funeral will normally include:
 - A. Chapel Service.
 - Visitation Detail of the Honor Guard.

- Services of CCFD Chaplain.
- Color Guard
- Honor Guard
- Bagpipers/Drummers/Soloist
- B. Graveside Service
 - Above services continued.
 - CCFD graveside ceremony/farewell.

CCFD uniformed members attending retired member services, whether on or off duty, may wear Class A uniform or appropriate civilian attire.

Regardless of the classification of service, or level of CCFD participation, our involvement should be carried out with dignity and reverence for the deceased, as well as the surviving family.

ATTACHMENTS

A. Sample Announcement Memo Text to all Stations/Sections

It is my sad duty to inform you that at _____ [time] today Firefighter(s) [rank] [names] was/were killed in the line of duty. Details of the incident are not fully known. I have ordered an immediate and thorough investigation of the events surrounding this tragedy.

I will provide you with more information as soon as it is available, including details of services.

This is a difficult time for the entire Corpus Christi Fire Department, and we will need to come together to get through it. All of us know when we choose firefighting as a career that this type of occurrence is possible. But that does not make it any less tragic or any less difficult to bear once it actually happens.

At this time our thoughts and prayers are with the _____[name] family. I urge you to support them in any way you can.

I wish I had the words to ease the pain all of us are feeling, but I don't. I would only remind us all that this/these was/were (a) firefighter/s doing the job he/she/they loved on behalf of people he/she/they cared about.

B. NOTIFICATION TEAM CHIEF OFFICER CHECK SHEET (Make sure communication is flowing in all directions.)

- Coordinate with administration staff to gather all pertinent information about the employee's family.
- Coordinate a meeting place with the Chaplain, if assigned to the notification team.
- Meet the Chaplain and discuss who will say what to the family.
- Speak with Shift Commander by telephone before approaching the home or other site of the notification.
- Deliver the news quickly after gathering all present family members.
- Let the family grieve without overwhelming them with information.
- Advise the Shift Commander when all necessary notifications have been made.
- Notify the Shift Commander if you will be transporting the family anywhere or if the family

support liaison should be sent.