

<b>SCOTTS VALLEY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT</b>		
<b>STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES</b>	<b>ARTICLE: I</b>	<b>SOP: 1117</b>
	<b>SECTION: 1100 Personnel</b>	
	<b>SUBJECT: DEATH or SERIOUS INJURY Notification Procedures</b>	

**Purpose:** To provide a consistent procedure to outline family notifications and protocols in the event of a serious on the job injury or death of an employee

**Scope:** Applies to all personnel

**INTENT**

This procedure describes the communications activities that should take place in the event an employee is seriously injured or killed in the line of duty. It establishes a priority for notification, identifies steps for conducting notifications, and provides guidelines for news media contacts. The goal of the procedure is to ensure that swift and compassionate notification is made to the families of employees who are injured or killed in the line of duty, and that the extension of assistance and support to the family will be the overriding philosophy of the Scotts Valley Fire Protection District.

**PROCEDURE:**

1. For purpose of this SOP, a serious injury is defined as an injury that is life-threatening or that will disable the employee for a substantial period of time.
2. The Incident Commander, will notify the Duty Chief and in turn, he will notify the Chief of an injury or death involving department personnel immediately.
3. The Duty Chief will be the point of contact for making assignments and will coordinate actions with the Fire Chief and staff. The Duty Chief should follow the steps on the Duty Chief Checklist unless involved in an ongoing incident, in which case a separate Chief Officer will be assigned to assist.
4. All inquiries related to the incident should be referred to the Incident Commander, Information Officer, or to the Duty Chief as appropriate.

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5. The Duty Chief must immediately initiate the district's Accident Investigation Procedure.

Employee Line-of-Duty Death Notifications

The Duty Chief, in coordination with staff, will assign a two-person team to locate and inform the employee's family. One member shall be a Chief Officer.

1. Notify department Chaplain (if available)
2. Contact member's church representative if appropriate.

**The Notification Team**

The team will consist of a Chief Officer and, ideally, a department Chaplain if available. While consideration should be given to choosing the most appropriate Chief Officer and Chaplain to make the notification, selecting the ideal team is less important than moving as quickly as possible. For an employee's family who lives within the county, the goal is to make the notification within one hour of the Duty Officer learning of the injury or death. If more than one employee has been injured or killed in an incident, separate teams may need to be assigned to each affected family.

The Chief Officer assigned to the team will gather as much validated information about the incident as possible (who, what, when, where, how, & why).

Team members should wear the day uniform.

It may be necessary to make notification to more than one person or family group, for example, a spouse and a parent.

The team members should meet prior to going to the next of kin's home or location. The meeting should occur away from the location where the family will be found. The meeting will establish the roles of the team members and allow exchange of all known facts. When the team members have met and are prepared to proceed, the Chief Officer should obtain the latest information.

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If the Duty Officer or another member is aware of a special relationship between the deceased employee's family and another employee, it may be appropriate to have that employee accompany the notification team.


**Notifying the Family**

The team members should follow these notification guidelines.

1. Do not park directly in front of the family's home or work location. The person who will make the notification should make introductions at the door and ask to come in.
2. The notification should be made briefly and directly. It is best to give key information quickly and in one or two brief sentences. For example, "\_\_\_\_\_ responded to a fire today and was trapped when a roof collapsed. "I am sorry to tell you that \_\_\_\_\_ was killed."
3. Information regarding any precipitating factors or information that is not verified should not be provided until an investigation has been completed.
4. Team members will communicate the support and sympathy of all members of the department.
5. Team members should be attentive to providing appropriate response to family member's emotional response. Generally family will ask what they want to know when they wish to know.
6. Family members should be asked if there is a support person who can be called for them, and if there are other immediate family that should be notified by the team. Primary family should be clearly advised that they may count on the support of the fire department to help them get through the difficult days to come.

The Chief Officer will advise the Chief and staff when all necessary notifications have been made. The Duty Officer will then inform the Public Information Officer (PIO) that they may publicly release the information.

When next of kin is out of the area, the Duty Officer should select a team in the same manner as described above. The team will travel to meet with the family as quickly as possible.

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**Family Support**

Following any employee death, the Duty Officer will assign a Family Support Liaison to assist the family. The Family Support Liaison should be the most appropriate person available to perform this role without regard to rank. The Family Support Liaison will be relieved of other duties to the extent necessary to fulfill this responsibility. The Family Support Liaison will provide moral support and comfort to the family and assist in obtaining answers to their questions. Until directed otherwise, it will be the responsibility of the Family Support Liaison to communicate to the fire department staff the family's needs and concerns.

The Family Support Liaison will be briefed and will be sent to the appropriate location as determined by the Notification Team. Unless the family desires otherwise, the Notification Team will remain with the family until the Family Support Liaison arrives. The Family Support Liaison must be sensitive to the family's need to grieve privately and use discretion in when to leave them. When leaving, the Family Support Liaison will ensure family members know how to reach him/her and will establish a time to contact them in the future.

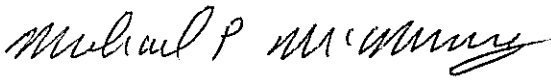
As soon as it is deemed appropriate, but in no case more than 8 hours after the employee death, the Fire Chief should visit the family. Guidance will be offered by the Family Support Liaison about when and where such a meeting should take place.

The Chief will appoint a Chief Officer to administer the department Funeral Procedure and who will then coordinate with the Family Support Liaison.

**Other Notifications**

The Duty Officer will ensure that additional notifications are made as required.

1. Required notifications immediately following a confirmed line of duty death or serious injury:
  - a. Public Information Officer
  - b. District Board Members
  - c. City Manager in the city where the death occurred

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- d. Employee Association leadership
  - e. Chief Investigator
  - f. Other Notifications as Determined by Management
2. Following a line of duty death certain notifications should be made in advance of media news release.

Fire Department employees should be notified as soon as possible after family notification is made.

A brief notification should be made by Net Com and CDF/ECC with a message following describing the facts of the incident.


3. The Duty Officer should prepare a memo to all district employees with the validated details of the employee death. The memo should also be sent to all fire agency stations with in the county.

**News Media Relations**

It is the policy of SVFPD to be as open as possible with the media and to disseminate information as quickly as is reasonable, except that:

- 1. The employee's family must be properly notified before any information is given to the news media contacts.
- 2. All information must be validated before released.

The announcement or confirmation of a line of duty death, and the release of the employee's name will be made by the Fire Chief, or in his absence, the Division Chief.

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A PIO may be assigned by the Duty Chief.

Prior to the confirmation that the employee's family has been notified; no details will be released concerning the death. Neither the name or work location of the employee will be released. No specifics concerning how the death occurred will be offered or confirmed. If the news media is on the scene and aware of the death, the PIO will simply confirm that a death has occurred and communicate the District's compassion and concern for the employee's family and colleagues. The PIO will promise to provide the full details as soon as they are known and after the proper notification of next of kin have been made.

If an employee death occurs in the midst of ongoing news coverage of a fire or other emergency, the PIO will focus on handling the details concerning the death, and an additional spokesperson may be brought in to handle media relations for the ongoing incident.

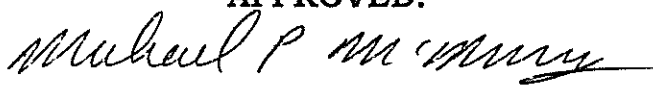
Seriously Injured and Hospitalized Employee (Line of Duty)

All of the notification and Support Procedures described above will be applied to serious line of duty injuries except as noted below. In addition, the Duty Chief will ensure close coordination with the treating medical facility.

If the injured employee has been taken to a hospital, the Duty Chief will assign a Chief Officer not involved in the incident to go to the hospital and become the hospital liaison. The Chief Officer will establish communications with the hospital and report regularly to the Duty Chief on the employee's condition.

**The Notification Team**


As is the case of an employee death, a two-person team will be dispatched by the Duty Chief to notify the injured employee's next of kin. The Duty Chief will decide whether to be included as part of the notification team, but at least one Chief Officer will be on the team. The goal is to make the notification as quickly as possible and to assist the family members at the hospital.

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The responsibilities of the notification team are the same as for a line-of-duty death, with the exception that the team members will offer to drive the family to the hospital where the employee has been taken. Additional personnel should be dispatched if necessary to provide transportation of family as needed.

The Family Support Liaison will relieve the notification team and to serve as the fire department contact point with the family members.

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