

Coldsprings-Excelsior Fire and Rescue Line of Duty Death

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to outline the responsibilities for following fire department protocol involving a line of duty death.

The death of any member of the Coldsprings-Excelsior Fire and Rescue 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, or while engaged in firefighting or EMS activities off duty.

PROCEDURE

This procedure defines the policies and responsibilities to be followed in the event of a line of duty death, and can be escalated in the event of multiple deaths or a number of members seriously injured.

ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

Fire Chief or Assistant Fire Chief:

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

Scene Commander Responsibilities:

In the event of a line of duty death, the on-duty Scene Commander shall:

Notify the Fire Chief, Assistant Chief, or highest-ranking available Officer.

Secure the scene of the incident with the assistance of Coldsprings-Excelsior Fire and Rescue Department and Police Department personnel.

- Direct the PIO and Central Dispatch to withhold release of personal data relating to the member 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 personnel from Coldsprings-Excelsior Fire and Rescue to 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.
- Assign an Auditing Officer, as soon as possible, to secure the personal effects of the deceased and deliver them to Fire Administration.
- 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 and Board Officer upon their request to be kept up to date with events, as they have occurred.
- Coordinate with other Mutual Aid Department/Chiefs a personnel roster to relieve crews on the scene and provide personnel to fill staff functions.
- Preserve any equipment, turnouts and breathing apparatus used by injured or deceased firefighters for the investigation.
- Preserve any and all tactical worksheets, video and/or audio tapes for the investigation.

Auditing Officer – ensures the security and proper disposition of the personal effects of a member in the

event of his/her death. Personal effects shall include all property owned by the deceased member that is kept on 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 Chief. 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 Assistant Chief 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 to receive the 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 will then be forwarded to the Fire Chiefs 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, PIOs, Fire Administration and the Fire Ground Commander via telephone.

Responsibilities – until relieved:

- ❑ Update Fire Ground Command of any significant information relating to the patient's condition.
- ❑ Assure that no press releases are made.
- ❑ 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).
- ❑ Collect all personal articles of the firefighter, should pronouncement of his/her death occur.

Public Information Officer – should be appointed as soon as possible if assigned PIO's are not readily available.

Responsibilities –

- ❑ Attempt to collect all the facts of the incident as it occurred.
- ❑ Make contact, preferably via telephone, with Central Dispatch (**Do not use the radio**):
 - A. Fill them in on the situation.
 - B. Instruct them not to issue any statements to the media or anyone else.
 - C. Advise them they will be receiving a written news release as soon as next of kin have been notified.
- ❑ Begin to collect all pertinent and personal information on the victim(s).
- ❑ Keep in contact via telephone with Hospital Liaison Officer(s) on status of injured firefighter(s).
- ❑ Provide Notification Officer(s) with the information they need prior to making their contact with the next of kin.
- ❑ Begin to prepare a written press release.
- ❑ Under no circumstances should a press release be issued until next of kin notification can be made and the proper authority has been given to issue the news release. (See Notification Officer).

Notification Officer(s) – The Fire Chief and Assistant Chief are responsible for the notification of the next of kin. The specific assignment of this duty (Notification Officer(s)) will be made by the Fire Chief.

Prompt and judicious notification of the next of kin is the utmost importance in the case of a line of duty death. An official representative of the Fire Department through personal contact shall make notification if possible. 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.

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. 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:

- ❑ Wear dress uniform with tie (if time permits).
- ❑ Assign a Fire Department member to accompany him/her, also in dress uniform with tie.
- ❑ Have an official Coldsprings-Excelsior Fire and Rescue Department ID Card in their possession.
- ❑ Familiarize themselves with the circumstances of the death and the personal data concerning the deceased before making the notification. (Contact PIO).
- ❑ Determine if the family has a particular person, specifically a close family member and/or department member, to act as Family Liaison Officer.
- ❑ Once notification has been made, the Notification Officer will advise the Fire Chief or his representative, Incident Commander, Central Dispatch and the Public Information Officer.

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

Survivor Action Officer:

The Fire Chief will appoint a Survivor Action Officer to work in conjunction with a Family Liaison Officer 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 representative 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 representative.

The Survivor Action Officer is responsible for the management of several important activities. The principle 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, more than one Survivor Action Officer shall be assigned.

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 will require the assignment of more than one officer.

Family Liaison Officer:

On call to the surviving family 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.

FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS

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

- The Funeral Home Director
 - The Minister and church to arrange the funeral service
 - 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 Bureau as soon as the church and cemetery are confirmed. P.D. will set the procession route.

The Procession Officer and the Chief's need to determine which Departments will standby along the route. Maps should be prepared and given to respective Departments and Central Dispatch 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. 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 have it 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 Kalkaska Transit to acquire buses (2) for the procession. Have them meet at Station 6 to pick up individuals wishing to attend but do not wish to drive themselves.
 - Select the number of trucks and cars that will be needed to transport the deceased, pallbearers, Village Officials, Chiefs, Officers, etc.
 - Have a new pair of turnouts to be placed on the truck carrying the deceased.
 - Obtain an American Flag, a board or placard with the member's name to hang on the tailboard. Large picture blowups should be obtained to hang on each side of the truck.
- Prepare the truck. (Removal of hose, bed dividers, cleaning and decorating, etc.). Off duty personnel and family may be able to assist in the decorating.
- In the event of inclement weather have a contingency plan for emergency car wash. This includes staff cars and vehicles used for pallbearers, parking lot detail, etc.
- Assistant Chief – makes notification to and 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

- ❑ 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 Union Officer.
- ❑ Conduct an instructional meeting with the ushers before the visitation and the funeral. The Funeral Director will have valuable input in this area.
- ❑ Have the ushers at the church services instructed, in place and ready to seat people a minimum of one hour before the start of the services. People will be arriving early.
- ❑ The Chief needs to locate a Color Guard. The Traverse City Fire Department or the Marine Corps can make one available.
- ❑ If the deceased is not a vet, have the pallbearers or other members fold and present the flag. If this is the case, it needs to be laid out and practiced ahead of time. The Marine Corps may be able to provide someone to help with the exact protocol.

CAD ANNOUNCEMENT

Following notification of the next of kin, a CAD 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, all flags on Fire Stations and other Departmental facilities will be lowered to half-mast and all badges will 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. (Badge shrouds can be made prior).

FUNERAL PROCESSION UNIFORM

Members attending the funeral in uniform shall be in dress uniform to include tie and badge shroud. Members assigned to apparatus stationed along the procession route shall be in dress uniform to include tie and 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 Chiefs Association will coordinate with the surrounding cities to provide cover departments at our fire stations during the funeral. Several offers may be received by the Chief.

EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION INFORMATION

The Emergency Notification Form is a confidential record, completed by members of the Department.

The form provides the CEFR 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 the Department's Clerk. Members of the Fire Department should list at least two people to contact in case of emergency. These should include immediate family members, close friends and preferred clergy members, if any. This information should include work addresses and phone numbers where applicable. The form should also contain information of the members hospital preference and his/her blood type.

INVESTIGATION

As soon as possible after a line of duty death has occurred, the Fire Chief shall assign an Investigation Team to conduct an investigation of the circumstances of the event. The objective of this team shall be to thoroughly analyze and document the events leading to the death and to make recommendations aimed at preventing similar occurrences in the future.

This procedure may also be utilized in the event of a serious accident involving Fire Department personnel which may or may not have resulted in death or injuries.

The principle goal of the Investigation Team shall be to identify the causal factors pertaining to the event and to recommend actions that would prevent or reduce the risk of a similar event.

A secondary objective shall be to obtain, document and secure evidence which may be a factor in any regulatory actions or litigation resulting from the incident.

If the death occurred at a fire scene the Investigation Team report shall be separate and distinct from any Fire Cause Investigation. A copy of the Fire Investigation report shall be included in the final report package.

The Investigation Team report and all related documentation shall be an internal Fire Department administrative report.

An officer designated by the Fire Chief shall direct the investigation of incidents involving death or serious injury to Fire Department members. The Investigation Team shall report through the designated Team Leader, who shall be responsible for the management of the investigative process.

The Investigative Team shall include the Fire Department Safety Officer, City Safety Officer, a P.D. Arson Detective and such additional personnel as may be required by the specific circumstances of the event.

All members of the Fire Department shall give their full and complete cooperation to the Investigation Team.

Duties and Responsibilities of the Investigation Team:

- Gathering and analysis of all physical evidence relating to the event.
- Interview of all witnesses with direct or indirect knowledge of the circumstances.
- Documentation of radio traffic, telephone conversations, photographs, film, videotape and related information.
- Consultation with persons having special knowledge of the factors involved in the incident, including experts and consultants from the private sector.
- Liaison with other agencies involved in investigation of the incident.
- Development of a full written report of the incident, including conclusions and recommendations.

The Investigation Team Leader shall establish and maintain an ongoing liaison with the Township Attorney, and Fire Board.

It is the policy of the CEFR Department will cooperate fully with all other governmental agencies having legal cause to be involved in the investigation of a Line of Duty Death incident and to cooperate voluntarily with organizations working in the areas of fire service occupational safety and health education and training.

The Division of Michigan Occupational Safety and Health will conduct an investigation of incidents resulting in serious injury or death of Fire Department members. The Investigation Team will provide a liaison with the MIOSHA investigators.

Other governmental agencies which may be involved in an investigation include:

*United States Fire Administration
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health
Law Enforcement Agencies
Michigan State Fire Marshal's Office*

The participation of these agencies shall be at their own discretion, depending on the circumstances of the incident. These agencies may or may not produce their own reports of the incident with recommendations or corrective actions. These reports do not supersede the Investigation Team Report.

The Investigation Team shall utilize the resources of individuals and agencies outside the Fire Department to assist in the investigation and/or provide technical consultation when necessary. These resources include:

*National Fire Protection Association
International Association of Fire Chiefs
International Association of Fire Fighters
Consultants
Testing Laboratories
American Petroleum Institute*

Documentation:

The Investigation Team shall ensure that the scene of the incident is fully documented, including diagrams, photographs and observations.

When feasible, all witness interviews shall be recorded and/or transcribed. When recording and/or transcription is not feasible, the investigator's notes of the interview shall be filed.

The Investigation Team shall coordinate its activities with Fire Prevention to avoid interference in any criminal investigation relating to the incident.

NOTIFICATION LIST

A. U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE - Line of Duty Death. Call with the following information:

- Deceased Name, Occupation and Title
- Widow/widowers name
- Names and DOB of Children
- Widow/Widowers mailing address
- Fire Chief's Name
- Name and Address of Contact Person
- Description of Incident

*Public Safety Officers' Benefit Program Bureau of Justice Assistance Washington, D.C.
20531 202-307-0635 or Toll Free 888-744-6513 (8:30 to 5:00 Monday – Friday EST)*

Upon receipt of the above information by the Department of Justice, forms will be forwarded to the Fire Department for completion.

In order for a firefighter's surviving dependents to receive the Federal Public Safety Officer's Benefit, certain tests must be made before death, or at the time of death.

- It is necessary to obtain a complete blood toxicology report primarily concerning blood alcohol and Carbon Monoxide levels.
- In cases involving a non-traumatic injury, such as a heart attack, it is also necessary to obtain a complete blood toxicology report as stated above. It is imperative that they receive an accurate toxicology report to complete benefit payments. If our local labs are unable to get accurate Carbon Monoxide levels below 10%, contact the Department of Justice and they will be able to run the test.
- A copy of the autopsy must be provided and if no autopsy was performed, an affidavit stating one was not performed must be provided.

If a firefighter is injured to the point of permanent disability, he/she is eligible for a one time lump sum payment equal to the current benefit listed above provided they meet the following criteria:

- They are totally disabled and will never be able to hold another job.
- They receive the maximum benefit from their primary workmen's compensation claim.
- They are released from the Fire Department.

B. U.S. FIRE ADMINISTRATION/NATIONAL FIRE ACADEMY

Notify the U. S. Administration (USFA) and the National Fire Academy (NFA) by telephone in the event of a firefighter "Line of Duty Death" so they may lower the flags over the Fallen Firefighters' Memorial in respect.

USFA 301-447-1272 8:30 – 5:00 EST Monday – Friday
or NFA 301-447-1123 8:30 – 5:00 EST Monday – Friday
or 301-447-1000 (Security Office) after working hours.

C. COPIES OF DEATH CERTIFICATE

Order through the funeral director (12 copies). Allow one week for delivery.

If unavailable through the funeral director, order directly through the County Health Department.

D. LIST OF CEFR BENEFITS IN LINE OF DUTY DEATH

1. Notify Fire Board Chair

Coldspring Excelsior Fire and Rescue
Standard Operating Policies
6565 County Road 612 NE
Kalkaska, MI 49646

Section 1.4

Approval Signatures

Fire Chief :

_____ Date: _____

Assistant Fire Chief:

_____ Date: _____

Coldsprings Twp Representative:

_____ Date: _____

Excelsior Twp Representative:

_____ Date: _____