

Line-of-Duty Death and Injury Notification

1037.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to describe the communication activities that should occur in the event a member is seriously injured or killed in the line of duty. The policy establishes a priority for notifications, steps for conducting each set of notifications and identifies roles and responsibilities.

1037.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Fresno County Fire Protection District to ensure to the extent reasonably practicable that immediate and compassionate notification is made to the family of members who are injured, hospitalized or killed in the line of duty. The District shall make it a priority to offer assistance and support to the member's family.

1037.3 PROCEDURE

- (a) For the purpose of this policy, an injury or hospitalization is defined as a medical condition that is life threatening or has the potential to disable the member for a substantial period of time.
- (b) The Incident Commander at the scene of the injury or death will immediately notify the Duty Chief and provide the necessary information.
- (c) The Duty Chief will be the point of contact for making assignments and will coordinate actions with the Fire Chief and others.
- (d) All inquiries related to the incident should be referred to the Incident Commander, Public Information Officer or the Duty Officer, as appropriate.
- (e) In the event of the death of a member, the Duty Officer must immediately initiate the procedures in the Line-of-Duty Death Investigation Policy.

1037.4 DEATH NOTIFICATIONS

The Duty Chief, in coordination with Fire Chief or the authorized designee, will assign a two-person notification team consisting of two Chief Officers to locate and inform the member's family. If more than one member has been injured or killed in an incident, separate teams will be assigned to each affected family. The team should contact the Administration Division to obtain information regarding the employee's next of kin.

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Policy Manual

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1037.4.1 NOTIFICATION TEAM RESPONSE

The notification team shall make the necessary family notification as quickly as practicable, with the goal of making the notification within two hours of the Duty Officer learning of the injury or death. The following should be considered when planning the notification:

1037.4.2 NOTIFYING THE FAMILY

The team members should adhere to the following notification guidelines:

- (a) The team should not park directly in front of the family's home or workplace. The person who will make the notification should make introductions at the door and ask to be invited in.
- (b) Notification should be made briefly and directly.
- (c) Information regarding precipitating factors or information that is not verified should not be provided until an investigation has been completed.
- (d) Team members should communicate the support and sympathy of the Fire Chief and all members of the District.
- (e) Team members should ask family members whether they would like the team to notify other parties, such as clergy or grief counselors.

1037.4.3 NOTIFICATION OF FAMILY OUT OF THE AREA

If the immediate next of kin of the deceased employee lives more than two hours away, the Duty Officer may make arrangements to have someone in the family's area make the notification. The following should be considered:

- (a) Whether the notification should be made by the local clergy or another person in the area who has a relationship with the family.
- (b) Whether the fire department in the family's city of residence may be the most appropriate entity to make the notification or whether that department can assist in obtaining information about the family.
- (c) Whoever is selected to make the notification should be provided with the information contained in this policy.
- (d) The notification plan must include a coordinated telephone call with the family and the Duty Chief or the authorized designee.
- (e) The Duty Chief or the authorized designee should be prepared to speak to the family by phone as soon as the notification is made.

1037.4.4 INTERNAL DISTRICT NOTIFICATIONS

The following internal notifications should be made in advance of any media release:

- (a) All on-duty Chief Officers should be notified.

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- (b) All employees should be notified as soon as possible after the family notification is made.

1037.4.5 GOVERNING BODY AND LABOR NOTIFICATIONS

The Duty Officer will ensure that additional notifications are made as required, after the next-of-kin notification. Notifications that are required as soon as practicable after a confirmed line-of-duty death or injury include the following:

- (a) Elected officials or board of directors
- (b) Board President
- (c) Employee labor representatives
- (d) District safety officer who will make the necessary notifications.
- (e) Other notifications as determined by the Fire Chief

1037.4.6 EXTERNAL NOTIFICATIONS

The following external notifications will be made:

- (a) Notification to other local county fire agencies
- (b) Notification to the California Governor's Office of Emergency, Fire and Rescue Branch should be made for a line-of-duty death.
- (c) Notification to the California Office of Emergency Services (OES) Fire and Rescue Operational Area Coordinator

1037.5 FAMILY SUPPORT

The Duty Officer should appoint a Family Support Liaison, who should refer to the Family Support Liaison Policy for duties and responsibilities.

In the event of a line-of-duty death, the Fire Chief or the authorized designee should appoint a funeral detail officer to administer the Funerals Policy.

1037.6 NEWS MEDIA RELATIONS

It is the policy of the Fresno County Fire Protection District to follow the News Media Relations Policy when communicating with the media. In the case of a line-of-duty death, additional considerations include, but are not limited to, the following:

- (a) The employee's family must have received proper notification prior to any information regarding the identity of the deceased being released to the media.
- (b) All information must be validated prior to its release to the media.

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The PIO or the authorized designee shall be the spokesperson on most aspects of these events. However, the announcement or confirmation of a line-of-duty death and/or the release of the employee's name should be made by the Fire Chief or the authorized designee.

Prior to confirmation that the employee's family has been notified, no details will be released concerning the death. If the news media is on-scene and are aware of the death, the Public Information Officer will simply confirm that a death has occurred and communicate the district's compassion and concern for the employee's family and colleagues. The Public Information Officer will advise the media that the full details will be provided as soon as they are known and after proper notification of next of kin has been made.

If an employee death occurs in the midst of ongoing news coverage of a fire or other emergency, the Public Information Officer will focus on handling the details concerning the death. Another trained spokesperson will be assigned to handle the media relations for the incident.

1037.7 SERIOUSLY INJURED OR HOSPITALIZED EMPLOYEE

All of the notification and support procedures described in this policy for a line-of-duty death should be applied to any instance of an employee who has been seriously injured in the line of duty, except as noted below:

- (a) If the injured employee has been taken to a hospital, the Duty Chief should assign a Chief Officer, who is not involved in the incident, to go to the hospital and become the hospital liaison.
- (b) The Chief Officer should establish communications with the hospital and report regularly to the Duty Chief on the employee's condition.
- (c) A representative of the employee's labor organization will also be sent to the hospital, if possible.

The hospital liaison and labor representative should work cooperatively for the benefit of the employee and his/her family. In addition, the Duty Chief should ensure close coordination with the treating medical facility.

1037.8 INJURY OR HOSPITALIZATION NOTIFICATION TEAM

The same practices and procedures detailed in 1074.4 shall apply to an employee who is seriously injured in the line of duty.