

	BRIDGEPORT POLICE DEPARTMENT	Distribution ALL PERSONNEL	General Order Number <b>6.16</b>
	POLICY AND PROCEDURE GENERAL ORDER	Original Issue Date 2/19/19	Reissue/Effective Date 9/30/22
Order Title: <b>DEATH NOTIFICATION</b>		Accreditation Standard: POSTC: 3.4.16	Section 6
		Section Title INVESTIGATIVE FUNCTIONS	
Rescinds:3.4.2, 3.4.16:A		<b>Rebeca Garcia, Chief of Police</b>	

*This General Order is for departmental use only and does not apply in any criminal or civil proceeding. This General Order should not be construed as creation of a higher legal standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense with respect to third party claims. Violations of this General Order will only form the basis for departmental administrative sanctions. Violations of law will form the basis for civil and criminal sanctions in a recognized judicial setting*

## **I. PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this policy is to establish a written directive that provides guidelines to the Bridgeport Police Department related to death notifications to the next-of-kin.

## **II. POLICY:**

The notification of next-of-kin of deceased, seriously injured, or seriously ill persons will be carried out promptly but no later than twenty four hours after identification has been made and in a considerate manner. The Bridgeport Police Department requires that all officers become familiar with concepts and procedures set forth in this policy so as to provide surviving family members with sufficient useful information and support in a manner consistent with professionally accepted crisis intervention techniques.

## **III. DEFINITIONS**

Next of Kin: For purposes of this policy, next of kin means spouse; adult child; parent; adult sibling; or grandparent.

## **IV. PROCEDURE**

### **A. Information Gathering and Preparation**

1. The primary responsibility for the notification shall be assigned to the first responding officer. In the event the notification can not be made by the responding officer, the Detective Bureau will be tasked in locating the next of kin.

2. Officers should request the assistance of the agency chaplain, social worker or local crisis intervention specialist where feasible.
3. Officers shall be prepared to provide assistance, and shall be provided adequate discretion to provide assistance as authorized by this policy.
4. Prior to contacting next of kin, notifying officers shall gather and familiarize themselves with essential details concerning the deceased, to include:
  - a. full name
  - b. age
  - c. race
  - d. home address
  - e. details of the death
  - f. location of the body/personal effects
  - g. other pertinent information.
  - h. Time of death
5. Officers shall identify the next of kin of the deceased for purposes of notification. Particular effort should be made to locate the closest relative starting with a spouse and followed by parents, grandparents, brothers or sisters, then children.
6. Only where substantial delays would be required to make contact with next of kin should other relatives be contacted.
7. Officers shall contact a supervisor for guidance and shall document the reason for the failure or delay of notification and any attempts made to make such notification when a notification can not be made within 24 hours or in doubt concerning next of kin.
8. Wherever possible, officers should gather available information concerning the survivors that may aid in the notification. This includes, but is not limited to, whether survivors are elderly, disabled, visually or hearing impaired, have medical problems or may not speak English. If possible, obtain the names of the survivor's closest relative, friend, family doctor, and clergyman.
9. Officers shall ensure that they have on hand a list of referral agencies that may be helpful and should leave this with the survivors.
10. Officers should, wherever reasonably possible, avoid using the name of the deceased over the radio prior to notification of immediate surviving relatives.
11. Where possible, two officers should be assigned to a death notification.
12. All death notifications that are the responsibility of this agency shall be delivered in person unless the exigency of circumstances demand telephonic notification.
13. Where another agency must be contacted to notify the next of kin, officers should:

- a. request that the notification be made in person, and
  - b. request immediate verification when notification has been accomplished.
14. Personal effects of the deceased shall not be delivered to survivors at the time of death notification.
15. The failure of an officer to make a Death Notification within the allotted twenty four hour time frame will cause an investigation by the Inspector General.
16. If no person who is next kin of the deceased person is made, the next of kin may request the Office of the Inspector General to investigate the lack of notification.
  - a. The OIG shall investigate and determine the existence of any malfeasance on the part of the officer or supervisor.
  - b. The OIG may make disciplinary recommendations to POSTC if intentional or reckless indifference is discovered.
  - c. POSTC may revoke any certificate if the holder has been found to have failed to report or timely report a death to the next of kin.

**B. Making Notification**

1. Upon arrival at the residence or place of business, officers shall do the following:
  - a. check the accuracy of the location;
  - b. request to speak to the immediate survivor;
  - c. identify themselves by name, rank, and departmental affiliation; and
  - d. ask permission to enter the residence or (in the case of a business or other location) move to a place of privacy.
2. Every reasonable effort shall be made to make the death notification in the privacy of the survivor's home or in another location away from public scrutiny.
3. Prior to making notification, officers should, where possible, bring members of the family together who may be in the house or otherwise on hand.
4. Officers should address the survivor(s) in a straight forward manner and use easy-to-understand language to briefly explain the circumstances of the incident and the fact that the individual is dead.
5. Officers should not use euphemisms - such as "passed on" or "no longer with us" - in order to avoid using the term "dead" - as they may create confusion or false hope.
6. Officers should avoid graphic aspects of the incident and the use of police jargon.

7. Officers should refer to the deceased using his/her first name or terms reflecting the deceased's relationship to the survivor (i.e. son, daughter, etc.).
8. Officers should be prepared for unexpected responses from survivors to include hysteria and possible verbal or physical attack.
9. Officers should provide survivors with sufficient time to regain composure before proceeding. Avoid attempts in the interim to provide comfort by using simple platitudes or trite phrases (i.e. "I know how you feel," "I know how hard this is for you.")

### **C. Providing Assistance and Referral**

1. Officers shall not leave upon completion of the notification until reasonably assured that the survivor has adequate personal control and/or family or close friend(s) readily available to provide support. In gauging the need for assistance, officers shall also consider the following:
  - a. the emotional reaction and physical condition of the survivor;
  - b. the availability of other adults in the home;
  - c. responsibility for infants or small children; and
  - d. availability of a support system (e.g. including friends, family, close neighbors, access to clergy, means of transportation, etc.)
2. Officers should provide any additional information on the incident requested by immediate family members. While graphic details may not be necessary, officers should provide information if asked specifically concerning the cause of death, condition of the body, or other details of the fatality.
3. Officers should remain alert to the possible need for medical assistance. When officers are aware of serious medical conditions in advance of notification, they should place a local medical response unit on alert.
4. Officers should be aware of confusion on the part of survivors; speak slowly and deliberately, and write down any pertinent information that the survivor may need. This includes such matters as the following:
  - a. disposition of the body;
  - b. location of personal effects;
  - c. identification requirements/procedures; and
  - d. providing officers' names, agency and telephone numbers.
5. Officers should assess the physical and emotional well being of the survivor before departing. Officers should be reasonably assured that survivors can take care of themselves and those for whom they may be responsible. In addition to concerns

noted above, officers should be able to answer "yes" to the following types of questions:

- a. Is the survivor thinking clearly? That is, does the individual seem to be aware of your presence? Have some grasp of place and time? Demonstrate a progressive ability to express himself/herself? Begin to demonstrate some grasp of the reality of death?
  - b. Does the survivor have reasonable control over his/her emotions or does the individual display shock (no apparent emotion), furious hospitality, or the desire to commit suicide?
  - c. Can the survivor cope physically? For example, has the survivor fainted, displayed debilitating weakness or emotional collapse, and does the survivor have an adequate support system that can be relied upon?
6. Officers should not leave a lone survivor unattended until all reasonable efforts have been made to garner first-hand support from the survivor's family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, family clergy, crisis counselors or other community social service agency.

D. Translating.

If the family or household member does not speak English, the officer will need a translator. Occasionally, it will appear necessary to use a child in the household to assist but that should be avoided. Children should not be expected or requested to assume the psychological burden of translating a death notification and officers should not rely on children to accurately translate this type of critical information. Instead, the officer should ask the child to recommend a nearby adult who also speaks English and can be of assistance.

E. Information and Assistance

1. Family and household members may have questions that officers can answer at the time of notification. They may ask that other persons also be notified, ask the officer who else needs to be notified, or ask how to tell others. It may become an appropriate time to try to locate additional supporting members of the family, or local clergy if that has not yet been done. Officers should assist household or family members by making other contacts, if asked and within reason. As previously noted, separated families may present cause for multiple notifications and officers should seek to determine if, and to what extent, such a need is present.
2. If children who are in school need to be informed immediately, most schools have a counselor who may be called upon to assist with the communication. Some employers may have a "human resources" department which can provide support as well.

3. All questions pertaining to organ or tissue donation need to be referred to a hospital staff or family doctor. Autopsy requirements are governed by law but issues relating to autopsy or even transportation of remains frequently involve cultural, ethnic or religious questions.
4. In the event the death relates to a law enforcement incident that involves a report, the incident number, along with any other reporting officer names, should be provided to family and household members contacted.
5. Some deaths may lead to family contact by members of the news media. Officers should be aware of that possibility and alert family or household members to that possibility and family members are not under any obligation to speak with media representatives.