

## **Falmouth Fire-EMS Operating Guideline**

### **Notification of Firefighter Death / Serious Injury**

#### **Objective:**

To have guidelines for Falmouth Fire-EMS Department personnel to go by when having to notify the family in the event of a firefighter's death or serious injury and to make all personnel aware that such notification must be made in a professional and compassionate manner.

#### **Guidelines:**

It shall be the responsibility of the Fire Chief to properly notify the next of kin of a firefighter who has suffered severe injuries or has died. The Fire Chief may personally make the notification and/or designate a Notification Officer to inform the survivors. The Fire Chief must familiarize himself or herself with the circumstances of the death and the personal data concerning the death BEFORE making notification. By having a second person in attendance, the Fire Chief will be available to leave shortly after to return to the scene if necessary. The second person remains to see what they can do for the surviving family, getting additional medical help for the survivors if needed, being the compassionate listener.

The name of the injured or deceased MUST NEVER be released by the Department before the immediate family is notified.

If there is knowledge of a medical problem with an immediate survivor, medical personnel should be available at the residence to coincide with the death notification.

Notification MUST ALWAYS be made in person and NEVER ALONE.

Notification to the family will be done in a Fire Department uniform and in a marked Fire Department vehicle. The Chief of the Fire Department, or designee could appropriately accompany the Notification Officer. However, if the aforementioned persons are not readily available, notification should not be delayed until these people can gather. If there is an opportunity to get to the hospital prior to the death of the firefighter, DON'T WAIT for the delegation to gather. Attempt to bring the spouse, partner, or significant other to the hospital. The family should learn of the death from the Department first and not from the press or other sources. This is NOT the time to make idle promises to the family (i.e. "We'll promote him posthumously," "We'll retire his badge".)

Never make a death notification on the doorstep. Ask to be admitted to the house. Ask the survivor if they would like to sit down. Inform family members slowly and clearly of the information that you have. If specifics of the incident are known, the Notification Officer should relay as much information as possible to the family. Answer all questions honestly. Be sure to use the firefighter's first name during the notification. If the firefighter has died, relay that information.

Never give the family a false sense of hope. Use the words such as “died” and “dead” rather than “gone away” or “passed away”. Offer to make phone calls if the survivor wishes.

DO NOT take any personal clothing, jewelry, billfold, purse, etc to the notification.

If family requests to visit the hospital, they should be transported in a marked Fire Department vehicle. It is highly recommended that the family NOT drive themselves to the hospital. If the family insists on driving, a uniformed firefighter should accompany them in the family vehicle.

If young children are at home, the Notification Officer must arrange for babysitting needs. This may involve co-workers or others known to the family, transportation of children to a relative’s home, or a similar arrangement, transported by a fire vehicle.

Prior to departing to the hospital, the Notification Officer should notify the hospital staff and the Hospital Liaison (by telephone if possible) that a member of the family is enroute to the hospital.

The deceased or severely injured firefighter’s parents should also be afforded the courtesy of a personal notification if possible. Use a uniformed firefighter with a department vehicle if possible.

If immediate survivors live beyond the local area, the Notification Officer will ensure that the appropriate jurisdiction is contacted requesting a PERSONAL notification.

The Chief, or a high-ranking representative, should respond to the residence, or the hospital, to meet with family as soon as possible.

In the event of an on-duty death, the external monitoring of fire frequencies may be extensive. Communications regarding notifications should be restricted to the telephone whenever possible. If the media has somehow obtained the firefighter’s name, they should be advised to withhold it, pending notification of the next of kin. Members shall not give out any information of the incident. This will be done by the Chief or his designee.

In the event of a line-of-duty death, the Chief, or the Department Liaison Officer will transmit a message prepared and/or approved by the Chief, similar to the following: “It is with deep regret that announcement is made of the death of (Rank, Name, Company) who lost his/her life in the line-of-duty while participating in operations on fire call (Number, Location, Date and Time.) Record same in the Department log book. Death other than line of duty: “It is with deep regret that announcement is made of the death of” (Rank, Name) on/at time/date.

If family members arrive on the scene during on-going operations, it is important to identify them and keep them out of the direct flow of operations, particularly if the body is still trapped or on the scene. (Watch what is said around the family)

- a. Secure the scene of the area where the incident occurred.
- b. Secure all gear, equipment involved in the area.
- c. Photograph the total area and equipment.

Assure notification of all off-duty and vacationing personnel.

These guidelines may be changed or altered by the Fire Chief at any time.