Fire Department

On-Duty Death and Serious Injury Notification Procedures

Purpose: This SOP describes the activities that should take place in the event a firefighter is seriously injured or killed in the line of duty. It establishes priorities of actions to be taken and notification guidelines.

The first priority after caring for the victim is the compassionate notification of the injured or deceased member’s family, assuring their needs are taken care of, and provide support. Department member’s physical and mental health are to be a top priority of the department.

Procedure:

1. Immediately after a LODD or serious injury has occurred, the Incident Commander (IC) shall notify the chief of the department.
2. The IC should secure and guard the scene and only allow access to those who have authority to enter the scene. This would include arson investigators, police, and State Fire Marshal (SFM) Safety Representatives. If medical assistance is needed, it should be provided assuring that the scene is disturbed as little as possible. If fire is still active and it may destroy evidence, personnel should be allowed in the area to suppress the fire and protect any evidence. If the deceased is obviously dead, the scene should be left undisturbed. The scene should be maintained until all physical evidence is collected.
3. Evidence should be protected. Any gear, SCBA, and tools need to be impounded. The LODD/Serious Injury Evidence Checklist provides a list of possible evidence that should be gathered. If the firefighter is transported with PPE, the IC shall assign an individual to collect the evidence.

Physical evidence should be handled the same as for an arson or criminal investigation. A chain of custody form and collection form should be completed for all evidence. All evidence should be turned over to a SFM representative or qualified fire investigator. See attached Chain of Custody and Evidence Collection forms.

If the investigator is delayed, photos should be taken of the scene to include the area where the firefighter was injured or died.

1. Notifications :

* Line of Duty Death -The SFM Safety Section shall be notified immediately by calling 352-369-2813 or 352-427-4401. If communications are coordinated through dispatch, at no time should the firefighter’s name or identifying information be given over the air. The Chief will make arrangements for the notification of the family in a LODD.
  + The chief shall notify the National Fallen Firefighter’s Foundation via the 24-hour line-of-duty death hotline at 866-736-5868. The foundation can provide the Local Assistant State Team representative information.
  + Contact the Department of Justice’s Public Safety Officers Benefits (PSOB) Program at <https://goo.gl/1rSefc>.
* Serious Injury - As soon as the IC or chief knows that the firefighter will be hospitalized more than 24 hours, the SFM shall be notified using the above numbers. The IC shall ensure that personnel are assigned to respond to the hospital (Hospital Liaison) to gather information and prepare for the arrival of family members. The injured firefighter should personally contact their family if possible. If the firefighter is unable to notify his family, or upon his/her request, the Fire Chief will make arrangements for the notification.
  + After the family has been notified, the IC should contact the State Warning Point (State EOC # 1-800—320-0519 or 850-413-9900).

Media – The IC should direct the PIO and Communications Center to withhold release of personal data relating to the member or the death pending notification of next of kin.

* Department Personnel – The Chief will make arrangements to notify all personnel of the injury or death. The Chief shall ensure that peer counselors, chaplains, counselors, etc., are available for crew members and other fire department members.

1. Document the Condition of Safety Equipment – Information relating to the performance of protective clothing, breathing apparatus, and other safety equipment is extremely significant in fatalities or serious injuries that occur. This information should be documented by written notes and supporting photographs.
   * The Line of Duty Death/Serious Injury Evidence Checklist should be utilized.
2. Photograph the Scene – The IC shall ensure the scene is diagrammed and photographed in the same manner that a crime scene would be documented. If investigators are on scene, they can perform this function.
3. Identify Witnesses – Identify all witnesses including fire department personnel, possible civilians, any video sources, etc. Fire department personnel that witnessed the incident should be asked to immediately write a statement of what occurred, what they were doing, what they observed, and what actions were taken after the incident. These should be written as soon as possible after the incident before the crews critique or start conversing regarding the incident to assure that a true perspective is gained. The firefighter will need to sign and date this statement and turn it over to the chief or the chief’s designee. Other witnessed can be contacted later. Also, it is important that if you feel that a civilian may have photographs or information that may be useful to the investigation that an officer obtain contact information and ask them not to destroy any photographs or videos.
4. Arrange for an Autopsy – An autopsy should be conducted for every line-of-duty death. If the death is fire-related, the medical examiner should be requested to look at blood gases, including carboxyhemoglobin levels and other products of combustion. An alcohol level test is also necessary to meet the requirements of the PSOB program.
5. Fire Service Casualty Module (NFIRS 5) – The IC shall ensure a record of all injuries, including type of accident, agencies, nature of type of injury, body location, the specific activity at the time of injury or occurrence, cause of injury and contributing causes of injury is completed within the Fire Service Casualty Module (NFIRS-5). Such reports shall also contain any event, injury, or occurrence enumerated in Section 112.181., F.S., to which the presumptions therein are applicable.
6. Injury, Illness Log – the Chief shall ensure that the injury, illness log is completed according to t FL 69A-62.021.
7. Media Notifications – The Chief or assigned PIO will be the only contact regarding a serious injury or LODD. The Chief will notify all department personnel who is to receive inquiries regarding the incident. The information release to the media may include the firefighter’s name, age, rank, shift, date of employment, and a brief summary.
8. Utilize the Injury/Fatality Investigation Checklist to assure to gather additional information that will be needed for the investigation.