

# SUSSEX COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES

## STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

**SOP:** ADMINISTRATIVE SECTION 3.21

**SUBJECT:** LINE OF DUTY DEATHS OR DISABILITIES

**ORIGINATED:** 3/27/02

**REVISION:**

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this policy is to ensure support and emotional care for a member's family following a line of duty death. Coordination of events following the line of duty death of a Department member is an extremely important and complex responsibility. Professionalism and compassion must be exhibited at all times as an obligation to the member's survivors and to the Fire/EMS community. In order to provide the best possible services and support for the member's family, specific tasks may be assigned to selected members of the Department. Their titles are:

- Notification Officer
- Hospital Liaison Officer
- Family Liaison Officer
- Department Liaison Officer
- Funeral Officer
- Benefits Coordinator / Financial Officer
- Investigation Team

### I. POLICY

It shall be the responsibility of Sussex County Emergency Medical Services to provide liaison assistance to the immediate survivors of a paramedic who dies, or is seriously injured, in the line of duty, whether feloniously or accidentally, while an active member of the department. This assistance is provided whether the death was unlawful or accidental. This shall include the clarification and comprehensive study of survivor

benefits, and to provide tangible and intangible emotional support during this traumatic period of readjustment for the surviving family. Funeral arrangements of the deceased member are to be decided by the family, with their wishes taking precedence over the Department's.

## **II. DEFINITIONS**

### **A. LINE OF DUTY**

"Death or Disability in the line of duty" shall mean *any death or disability, arising out of and in the course of that person's assigned duty, including all normal and special duty assignments as ordered by his or her superiors, or assignments undertaken by "activation" within or outside of normal duty hours. Including while in transit to and/or from such duty.*

### **B. SURVIVORS**

1. Immediate family members
  - a. Spouse
  - b. All children (including legally adopted children)
  - c. Parents
  - d. Siblings
  - e. Other family members entitled
2. Other family members as directed
3. Significant others if so allowed by law

### **C. BENEFITS**

Financial payments, scholarships, tax benefits and special programs available to the immediate next-of-kin of the fallen employee.

1. Public Safety Officers Benefit Act
2. State of Delaware Death benefits
3. Sussex County Life insurance policy
4. Self owned Life insurance policies
5. Sussex County Paramedic Association
6. Educational benefits
7. Other benefits available
8. Reserved for future use

### **D. BENEFICIARY**

Those designated by the member as recipients of specific death benefits.

### **E. FUNERAL PAYMENTS**

Financial payments made to the surviving families of a paramedic killed in the line of duty which are specifically earmarked for funeral expenses.

### **III. Establishing a Family Support Team**

A. The Sussex County Emergency Medical Services Family Support Team will be responsible for necessary functions before, during and after the funeral. The director or his designee will activate the team as needed.

1. Director
2. Notification Officer (Team)
3. Hospital Liaison
4. Family Liaison Officer
5. Benefits Coordinator
6. Funeral Officer
7. Public Information Officer
8. Chaplain
9. Sussex County Paramedic Association

### **IV. Notifying Survivors**

A. The Sussex County Emergency Medical Services will establish a notification policy for survivors of fallen employees (Appendix A Notification Officer and Team)

### **V. Notifying members of the Department**

A. Once the family has been notified, members of SCEMS should learn of the incident from the department before it hears about it through the media. Members who were on the scene, either as a partner, responder, or Supervisor, should be relieved as quickly as possible. Supervisors will make every attempt to contact their respective shift personnel as soon as possible. This shall include members who may be away on vacation, if their destination is known. Members involved, and other members who may have been emotionally affected, by the serious injury or death of another member should attend a Critical Incident Debriefing held by a trained CISM Team, to be scheduled as quickly as possible. (This will normally be held after the funeral.)

### **VI. Notifying Others**

A. Other members of the community need to be notified after the family and the members of the department.

- B. The Director or designee shall be responsible for notifying the County Administrator, who will notify the County Council and other County Officials as needed. Other notifications will be the responsibility of the PIO or his/her designee.
- C. Other Departments within the State ( DSP, Kent and New Castle Counties) should be notified of the members death. A request for assistance of manpower should be requested to cover necessary time in Sussex County.

## **VII. Working with the media**

- A. The Departmental PIO will ensure notification of the family prior to giving any information to the media. Information to the public should include a prepared statement from the Director or his designee. The Information Officer or his designee may handle this.

## **VIII. Dealing with the Hospital**

- A. The critically injured paramedic will be transported to the nearest appropriate hospital. SCEMS will establish procedures to deal with local hospitals.( Appendix C, Hospital Liaison Officer)
- B. If the critically injured paramedic must be transported to a medical center out of the local area, SCEMS will establish procedures to assist the family in that location.

## **IX. Establishing a Community Response Network**

- A. SCEMS will set up a community response network that can be activated if a tragedy occurs.  
SCEMS will work with the community to establish procedures that allow immediate support to the family. (Appendix G)

## **X. Assisting the Family before and during the Funeral**

- A. SCEMS will ensure the family's wishes come first. To assist the family before and during the funeral, the department will establish needed procedures. (Appendix B, Family Liaison Officer and Appendix D, Funeral Officer)
- B. SCEMS will arrange for house monitor for surviving family on the day of the funeral.
- C. SCEMS will arrange for additional security for facilities and/or personnel as needed.
- D. Ensure that designated media area is honored

## **XI. Providing Benefit Information to the Family**

A. SCEMS will maintain an up to date list of death benefits available to survivors. The department will establish procedures on assisting the family with benefit issues. (Appendix F, Benefits Officer/Coordinator)

## **XII. Assisting the Family After the Funeral**

A. SCEMS will maintain contact with the family and establish procedures to ensure ongoing support.

1. Members of the Department must remain sensitive to the needs of the survivors long after the member's death. The grieving process has no timetable. More than half of the surviving spouses can be expected to develop a post-traumatic stress reaction to the tragedy.

2. Survivors should continue to feel that they are a part of the "medic family." They should be invited to Department activities to ensure continued contact.

3. Members of the Department are encouraged to keep in touch with the family. Close friends, co-workers and officials should arrange with the family to visit the home from time to time so long as the family expresses a desire to have these contacts continue.

4. The Director should observe the member's death with a short note to the family, and/or flowers on the grave.

5. Holidays may be especially difficult for the family, particularly if small children are involved. Increased contact with the survivors and additional support is important at these times.

# APPENDIX "A"

## NOTIFICATION OFFICER

### PROCEDURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. It is the responsibility of the on-duty Supervisor to properly notify the Director or Administrator on call of a member who has suffered severe injuries or died.
2. The Director or AOC shall immediately contact the **Notification Officer**, to inform the next-of-kin.
3. The Department will not release the name of the deceased member before the immediate family is notified.
4. If there is knowledge of a medical problem with an immediate survivor, medical personnel should be available at the residence at the time of notification.
5. Notification will be made in person and never alone. The Director or his designee, Chaplain, or close friend could appropriately accompany the **Notification Officer**. However, if the aforementioned persons are not readily accessible, notification should not be delayed until these people can gather. If there is an opportunity to get to the hospital prior to the demise of the member, do not wait for the delegation to gather. The family should learn of the death from the Department first and not from the press or other sources.
6. Never make a death notification on the doorstep. Ask to be admitted to the house. Inform family members slowly and clearly of the information you have. If specifics of the incident are known, the **Notification Officer** should relay as much information as possible to the family. Be sure to use the member's name during notification. If the member had died, relay that information. Never give the family false sense of hope. Use words like "died" or "dead" rather than "gone" or "passed away".
7. **Additional notes on notification:**
  - A. Reactions of the family may include hysteria, anger, fainting, physical violence, shock, etc
  - B. Assume a guard position. Ward off well meaning relatives who try to cheer the family up and "take their mind off it". Perhaps more harm can come from being "brave" and avoiding proper grieving.
  - C. Don't lie to child(ren) about the death or injury. They need to know the basic facts.
  - D. Attempt to keep the use of Alcohol and tranquilizers to a minimum.

- E. Make a list of names and phone numbers for the family to call if they need assistance. (Doctor, Police, relatives, Friends and your numbers). Place list near the phone.
8. If the family requests to visit the hospital, they should be transported in a departmental vehicle. It is highly recommended that the family not drive themselves to the hospital. If the family insists on driving, a member of the notification team should accompany them in the family car.
9. If young children are at home, the **Notification Officer** must arrange for baby-sitting needs. This may involve co-workers and their spouses, transportation of the children to a relative's home or similar arrangements.
10. Prior to departing for the hospital, the **Notification Officer** should notify the hospital staff and the **Hospital Liaison Officer** (by telephone, if possible) that a member(s) of the family is en route.
11. The deceased or severely injured member's parents (if not the immediate next of kin) should be afforded the courtesy of a personal notification whenever possible.
12. If immediate survivors live beyond the Sussex County area, the **Notification Officer** will contact The Delaware State Police Communications Division at (302) 855-2980 and request the Supervisor. The **Notification Officer** will advise the communications supervisor of the need to contact survivors due to a severe injury or death of an SCEMS member. The following information will be given to the communications supervisor:
  - A. The member's full name
  - B. Survivors Name
  - C. The last known address for survivors
  - D. The last known telephone number for survivors
  - E. Any information to be passed on to survivors regarding member's injury/death.
  - F. A contact name for Sussex County EMS personnel
  - G. A contact phone number for Sussex County EMS personnel
  - H. Request confirmation of notification from contacting agency
13. In the event of an on-duty injury or death, the external monitoring of radio frequencies may be extensive. Whenever possible, communications regarding notifications should be restricted to the telephone. If the media has obtained the member's name, they will be advised to withhold the information, pending notification of the next-of-kin.

## APPENDIX “B”

### FAMILY LIAISON OFFICER

#### PROCEDURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. The selection of a **Family Liaison Officer** is a critical assignment. An attempt should be made to assign someone who enjoyed a close relationship with the member and their family.
2. This is not a decision –making position, but rather a “facilitator” between the family and the Department.
3. Responsibilities of the **Family Liaison Officer** include:
  - a. ensuring that the needs of the family come before the wishes of the Department.
  - b. Assisting the family with funeral arrangements and making them aware of what the Department can offer if they decide to have an honors funeral. If they choose the latter, briefing the family on funeral procedure (i.e. presenting of flag, playing of Taps, bagpipes, firing salute, etc.).
  - c. Apprising the family of information concerning the death and any continued investigation.
  - d. Providing as much assistance as possible, including overseeing travel and lodging arrangements for out-of-town family members, arranging for food for the family, meeting child care needs, etc.
  - e. Being constantly available to the family.
  - f. Determining what public safety, church, fraternal and labor organizations will provide in terms of financial assistance for out-of-town family travel, food for funeral attendees following the burial, etc.
  - g. The **Family Liaison Officer** acts as a long-term liaison with the surviving family to ensure that close contact is maintained between the Department and the survivors and that their needs are met for as long as they feel need for support.
  - h. If there are no court proceedings surrounding the member’s death, the **Family Liaison Officer** will relay all details of the incident to the family at the earliest opportunity.
  - i. If criminal violations surround the death, the **Family Liaison Officer** will:
    - 1) Inform the family of all new developments prior to press release.
    - 2) Keep the family apprised of legal proceedings
    - 3) Introduce the family to the victim’s assistance specialists of the court.

- 4) Encourage the family to attend the trial, and accompany them whenever possible, and
- 5) Arrange for investigators to meet with the family at the earliest opportunity following the trial to answer all their questions.
- 6) Reserved for future use

## APPENDIX “C”

### HOSPITAL LIAISON OFFICER

#### PROCEDURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. The first official, other than the Director, to arrive at the hospital becomes the **Hospital Liaison Officer**. The **Hospital Liaison Officer** is responsible for coordinating the activities of hospital personnel, the member’s family, medics, police, the press and others. These responsibilities include:
  - a. Arranging with hospital personnel to provide an appropriate waiting facility for the family, the Director, the Notification Officer and others as requested by the immediate survivors.
  - b. Arrange for a separate area for fellow medics to assemble
  - c. Establishing a press staging area.
  - d. Ensuring that medical personnel relay pertinent information regarding a member’s condition to the family on a timely basis and before such information is released to others,
  - e. Notifying the appropriate hospital personnel that all medical bills relating to the injured or deceased member are directed to the Worker’s Compensation board. The family should not receive any of these bills at their residence.
  - f. Ensuring the family is updated regarding the incident and member’s condition upon their arrival to the hospital
  - g. Arranging transportation for the family back to their residence.
2. If it is possible for the family to visit the injured before death, they should be afforded that opportunity. The **Hospital Liaison Officer** should prepare the family for what they might see in the emergency room and should accompany them into the room for the visit if the family requests it. Medical personnel should advise the family of visitation policies and, in the event of death, explain why an “**examination**” (autopsy) is necessary.
3. The Hospital Liaison and Notification Officer should remain at the hospital while the family is present.
4. Do not be overprotective of the family. This includes sharing specific information as to how the member met their demise, as well as allowing the family time with the deceased member.

## APPENDIX “D”

### DEPARTMENTAL LIAISON OFFICER

#### PROCEDURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Responsibilities of the **Departmental Liaison Officer** shall include:
  - a) Working closely with the Family Liaison Officer to ensure the needs of the family are fulfilled.
  - b) Handling the news media throughout the ordeal. If the family decides to accept an interview, the **Departmental Liaison Officer / PIO**, should attend to “screen” questions presented to the family so as not to jeopardize subsequent legal proceedings.
  - c) Meet with the following individuals to coordinate funeral activities and establish an itinerary:
    - 1) Director
    - 2) Senior Staff
    - 3) Funeral director
    - 4) Family Priest, Rabbi, or minister
    - 5) Cemetery director
    - 6) Honor Guard
  - d) Issue a statement/message to include the following:
    - 1) Name of the deceased
    - 2) Date and time of death
    - 3) Circumstances surrounding the death
    - 4) Funeral arrangements (state if service will be private or a departmental funeral)
    - 5) Uniform to be worn
    - 6) Donations to charitable organizations, etc. in lieu of flowers as appropriate.
    - 7) Contact person and phone number for visiting departments to call to indicate their desire to attend or to obtain further information.
  - e) Determining if the family desires a burial in uniform and selecting a member to obtain a uniform and all accoutrements and deliver them to the funeral home.
  - f) Arranging for the delivery of the member’s personal belongings to the family.

14. Maintain a roster of all Departments sending personnel to the funeral including:
  - a. Name and address of responding agencies
  - b. Name of Chief or Director
  - c. Number of individuals attending the funeral
  - d. Number of individuals attending the reception after the funeral

## APPENDIX “E”

### FUNERAL LIAISON

#### PROCEDURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. The **Funeral Liaison** will direct the funeral activities of the Department, and visiting Departments, according to the wishes of the family. Under no circumstances should assumptions be made. *The family has final say.*
2. Together, the emotional trauma of bereavement, the lack of information, and time pressures place the family at an enormous disadvantage in making funeral arrangements.
3. It is important financially, as well as for peace of mind, that the family knows exactly the cost of the funeral arrangements, thereby ensuring that they are not charged for items not selected or used. The family should ask for a written price list. They should not be embarrassed about requesting price information; they need it to make a wise decision.
4. Arrange an appropriate assembly point for Funeral detail, and visiting departments.
5. Assure appropriate staging area for apparatus if separate from church or funeral home
6. Determine order of apparatus in procession
7. Coordinate traffic management with local Police Department, Fire Police and Delaware State Police.
8. Coordinate the vehicle staging at the church or funeral home and cemetery with the appropriate key people.
9. Secure Piper if so requested and desired by family
  - a) If Bagpiper is used, piper should play “Amazing Grace” as casket is carried from hearse/apparatus.
  - b) Piper may precede casket in procession or may be placed approximately 35 feet from gravesite.
10. Secure Bugler if so requested and desired by family
  - a) Bugler should be placed 50-75 feet from grave site
  - b) Bugler should be instructed to play “TAPS” at the appropriate time
11. If deceased is a veteran, contact local VFW or American Legion for a firing squad to fire volleys at the gravesite. The position of the firing squad is 50 to 75 feet from the gravesite.
12. Arrange for disposition of flowers after the funeral.
13. Ensuring the surviving parents are afforded recognition and that proper placement is arranged for them during the funeral and procession.

## APPENDIX “F”

### BENEFITS COORDINATOR

#### PROCEDURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. The **Benefits Coordinator** will gather information benefits and funeral payments available to the family.
2. The **Benefits Coordinator** should have the full support of the Department to fulfill this responsibility to the survivors. This person is given the responsibility of assuring all the appropriate paperwork is completed and following through with the family.
3. The **Benefits Coordinator** is responsible for:
  - a) Assuring all Worker’s Compensation paper work has been filed correctly
  - b) Contacts Sussex County Personnel without delay to assure that the beneficiary receives death and retirement benefits, the member’s remaining paychecks and payment for remaining annual and compensatory time.
  - c) Gathers information on all benefit/funeral payments to include the Public safety Officers Benefits Act, State of Delaware Death Benefits, and Sussex County Council Life insurance benefits.
  - d) Gathers information on other organizations, which may provide assistance to the family.
  - e) Assists in setting up any special trust funds or educational funds.
  - f) Assures a prepared copy of all benefits/funeral payments that are due to the family, listing names of beneficiaries and contacts at various benefits offices, and when they can expect payment.
  - g) Meets with the surviving family a few days after the funeral to discuss the benefits they will receive. A copy of the printout should be given to the family at this time.
    - 1) If there are surviving children from a former marriage, the guardian of those children should also receive a printout of what benefits the child(ren) may be receiving.
    - 2) Attention should be given to the revocation of health care benefits. Many providers allow a 30 day grace period before canceling or imposing monthly payments on survivors
  - h) Meets again with the family in about 6 months to ensure they are receiving benefits.

- i) The Sussex County Paramedic Association should be available to assist with setting up accounts for donations or contributions in memory of the member. The monies donated shall be used as directed by the primary survivor. Uses of the monies may include:
1. Immediate cash for necessary items
  2. Scholarships
  3. Additional Funeral Expenses

## BENEFITS SUMMARY

<b>Source of Benefit</b>	<b>Amount of Benefit</b>	<b>Contact Person</b>
1. Public Safety Officers Benefit Act	\$151,635.00  College expenses	U.S Dept. of Justice Office of Justice Programs 810 7 <sup>th</sup> Street Washington, D.C. 20531 1-888-744-6513 (voice) 1-202-616-0314 (Fax)
2. State of Delaware	\$150,000.00 Payable \$30,000 x 5 yrs  Full college tuition Payable directly to Educational facility For dependants	Delaware State Insurance Commissioner Dover, De. 19901 1-302-739-4251
3. Sussex County Council	\$25,000 Life Insurance Final Paychecks Pension Plan Assistance with 401 plans	Sussex County Personnel  1-302-855-7712
4. Social Security Administration	Death Benefits Survivor Benefits	1-800-772-1213 M-F 0700-1900
5. Veterans Administration	Veteran Benefits	1-800-461-8262 M-F 0800-1600

## **APPENDIX “G”**

### **COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

A comprehensive list of community resources is presently being compiled. The Complete list will be added upon its completion

## **Appendix “H”**

### **Investigation Team**

The investigation Team will consist of Members of Sussex County EMS. The members of the team shall consist of the following:

1. The Director or his/her designee
2. Operations Manager
3. Non-Involved Supervisor
4. Two Field Paramedics

- A. It shall be the responsibility of the Investigation Team to review all Departmental Policies and Procedures that directly affect on scene procedures and safety.
- B. The Investigation Team will act independently from outside investigative authorities.
- C. The Investigation Team can act as a liaison to outside investigative authorities when requested.
- D. The Investigation Team will report to the Safety Committee with a full report to determine if changes need to be made within the Department, to ensure the potential for similar conditions is minimal.