



Sheridan Police Department
Policies and Procedures
7.5
Chapter 7 – Employee Welfare
Section 5 – Line of Duty Death

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Signature:

The Sheridan Police Department will promptly notify and provide assistance to the immediate family of any employee who dies or is seriously injured in the line-of-duty. The chief of police may institute parts of this policy for cases of a member's non-duty related death.

Definitions

Beneficiary -	Those designated by the employee as recipients of specific death benefits.
Benefits -	Financial payments made to the family to insure financial stability following the loss of a family member.
HR Director -	Person with a good understanding of benefits that the family is entitled to, who sees that all forms for benefits are provided to the survivors and assists in the preparation of forms, assuring that they are completed in a timely manner.
Funeral Payments -	Financial payments made to surviving families of an officer killed in the line of duty, which are specifically earmarked for funeral expenses.
Informing Officer -	Officer responsible for notifying the surviving family. The senior ranking officer on the scene will be responsible for appointing the informing officer.
Liaison Officer -	Officer responsible for coordinating between the family and the department, to see that the family is kept up to date on events surrounding the death of the officer and developing information
Line of Duty Death -	Any action, felonious or accidental, which claims the life of a police officer who was performing work-related functions either while on or off duty.
Survivors -	Immediate family members of the deceased; spouse, children, parents, siblings, fiancée, and/or significant others.

7.5.1 Department Responsibilities

- A. The Sheridan Police Department will provide:
 - 1. Liaison assistance to the immediate survivors of an employee who dies in the line of duty, whether feloniously or accidentally;
 - 2. Assistance to the surviving family in filing for survivor benefits;
 - 3. Tangible and intangible emotional support during this traumatic period of re-adjustment for the surviving family.
- B. The department will debrief and provide emotional/psychological assistance to department personnel following the loss of an employee. It is a given that family members, friends and close associates of the fallen member will experience various levels of grief. However, the need for the police department to provide assistance or post incident debriefing cannot be stressed strongly enough. Counseling for all employees can be provided through the employee assistance program.

7.5.2 Notification

- A. The name of the deceased employee shall not be released to the media before the immediate surviving family has been notified. All media releases surrounding the death of an employee will be conducted only by the Chief of Police or his or her specific designee.
- B. The notification of the surviving family will be made in strict coordination/cooperation with the Sheridan County Coroner's Office. If the immediate surviving members of the deceased employee are from out of town, notification of the surviving members will be made in cooperation with the Sheridan County Coroner's Office and an appropriate law enforcement agency in that area.
- C. If there is knowledge of a medical problem with an immediate surviving family member, medical personnel should be dispatched to the residence to coincide with the death notification.
- D. Death notifications will always be made in person by the appointed officer. If possible, the family pastor, a known close member of the family, or another officer should accompany the informing officer.
- E. If the surviving family wishes to go to the hospital or mortuary they should be transported via department vehicle. It is urged that family members not drive themselves to the hospital or mortuary. Should there be serious resistance on the part of the family about the driving arrangements the informing officer will accompany the family in their personal vehicle if possible.
- F. When delivering a death message/notice of injury, the informing officer will make the notification in as humane a manner as possible given the circumstances. The information should be given to the surviving members of the family in a slow and clear manner giving them as many details as known. Speculation and suspicion surrounding any of the facts and circumstances should be avoided. If the officer or employee has already died, that information should be given to the family or surviving members at that time, and any sense of false hope should be avoided.
- G. A notification to other agencies will be made by teletype for officer deaths. Information needed to complete the teletype notification includes:
 - 1. Name of the deceased;
 - 2. Date/time of death;
 - 3. Circumstances surrounding the death;
 - 4. Funeral arrangements (to include if service is private or a police funeral);

5. Expressions of sympathy in lieu of flowers; and
6. Name and telephone number of the contact person for visiting departments to indicate their desire to attend and to obtain further information.

7.5.3 Assisting the Family at the Hospital & Mortuary

- A. Upon arrival at the hospital, the ranking officer or the informing officer will see that the family is updated on the incident.
- B. The ranking officer at the hospital should arrange for an appropriate waiting area for the family. This waiting facility should be separate from the area in which any witnesses, suspects, or investigating police officers are gathered. The ranking officer at the hospital or the informing officer should also ensure that medical personnel relay pertinent information to the family on the officer's condition, if the officer is not deceased. If the officer or employee is deceased, the informing officer or ranking officer at the hospital will assist the coroner as necessary explaining autopsy procedures and procedures that will be used in handling the employee's remains.
- C. The ranking officer or designee should be present during the entire time the family is at the hospital or mortuary and should arrange for whatever assistance the family may need at that time. If possible, those people who made the initial notification should be among those who are present.
- D. At such time as the family wishes to leave the hospital and/or mortuary, arrangements will be made for transportation back to the residence. At such time that the family is transported back to the residence, the family shall not be left alone until other relatives, close friends, a pastor, or others are available to remain with the surviving family.

7.5.4 Support for the Family

- A. The appointment of a liaison officer to work with the family will be made by the Chief of Police. The liaison officer ideally will know the deceased officer and be aware of family relationships. The officer should not be so emotionally involved with the loss that he or she would become ineffective. The liaison officer should refrain from becoming involved in a decision-making role. The liaison officer's role is that of facilitator between the family and the department. The duties of the liaison officer will be:
 1. To ensure that the needs of the family are met as much as possible and coordinated with the activities of the department;
 2. To inform the family of what the department can offer in the way of assistance if the family decides to have a "law enforcement funeral;"
 3. If requested by the family, the liaison officer will coordinate between the family and the funeral director and assist in coordinating funeral arrangements. Since most people have not pre-arranged their wishes for handling their own funeral, the family will most likely need to decide all aspects of the funeral;
 4. To keep current on information concerning the death and continuing investigation to help answer family questions;
 5. To provide as much assistance as possible overseeing arrangements for travel and lodging for out of town family members as needed;
 6. To be available to the family throughout this time period; and
 7. To see that the family is thoroughly briefed on the funeral procedures and that all funeral procedures are properly coordinated with department related activities.

- B. In the event that the media makes direct contact with the family, the liaison officer will provide whatever assistance they need to assist them in handling media inquiries.
- C. The liaison officer will work to make sure that logistical needs are met (baby-sitting needs, support needs, lodging and food requirements, etc.).
- D. The liaison officer's follow-up with the family includes:
 - 1. The assigned liaison officer will be responsible for maintaining contact with the surviving family members following the funeral. This contact will be made on a frequent basis initially after the death. The officer may assist the surviving family members as needed with whatever logistical needs they may have.
 - 2. The liaison officer will be responsible for coordinating family presence at any memorial services, and taking care to ensure that all immediate family members are included in memorial services.
- E. The liaison officer's follow-up will also include assisting the family in communicating with the Human Resource Director in order to:
 - 1. Assist the surviving family members as needed, in filing insurance policies, death and funeral benefits, federal survivor benefits, and other related matters as necessary.
 - 2. Discuss benefits they may receive within a few days following the funeral. At the time the HR Director visits with the family, a prepared list of benefits and payments due to the family, listing of beneficiaries, contacts at various benefit offices, and other items should be discussed. The City of Sheridan Killed in the Line of Duty section of the City Handbook contains a listing of benefits. After the initial visit, the HR Director should meet as needed with the surviving family members to ensure that they have not encountered difficulties in receiving survivor benefits. These contacts during the first six months after the death of the officer or employee will be conducted on a frequent basis.
 - 3. If there are surviving children from a former marriage, the children, if of legal age, or the guardian of those children should also receive a printout of what benefits the child or children are eligible to receive.
 - 4. The HR Director should pay special attention to the problems with possible loss of health insurance benefits to the surviving family.

7.5.5 Department Support for Surviving Family Awaiting Trial of Suspects

- A. It will be the responsibility of the liaison officer for keeping the family fully informed of legal proceedings including upcoming court proceedings, sentencing, or the paroling of suspects involved in police officer killings. If administrative decisions are made to withhold information for investigative purposes surrounding the death of an employee, then at the earliest opportunity the investigator and Chief of Police will meet with the family and fully answer all questions surrounding the incident.
- B. The liaison officer will be responsible under normal circumstances for fully informing the family as to the facts and circumstances surrounding the case and in particular if the case is being developed for prosecution.
- C. The victim advocates should be put into contact with the surviving family in order for the family to be apprised of what to expect during court proceedings. A department representative should be assigned to accompany the family throughout the trial.
- D. The surviving family members should be encouraged to attend any trials if they so desire, with appropriate support personnel assigned to assist the family if needed.

7.5.6 Other Department Considerations

- A. Honors available for sworn officers killed in the line of duty include:
 - 1. A casket watch is usually composed of officers from the honor guard. However, volunteers may stand watch at the discretion of the honor guard coordinator. Officers assigned to the casket watch must present an excellent uniform appearance. The dress uniform will be worn to include white gloves;
 - 2. Draping and folding of U.S. flag by honor guard;
 - 3. If the family requests pallbearers from the department, and they have no special request for who will serve as pallbearers, the honor guard coordinator will be responsible for selecting them. If possible and practical, the pallbearers should be officers that the slain member worked closely with, regardless of rank. Pallbearers will be under the direct command of the honor guard coordinator and will report to the funeral home as directed for inspection and instructions;
 - 4. Rifle squad (three-round volley);
 - 5. Taps;
 - 6. Vehicle escort.
- B. The honor guard coordinator will be responsible for coordinating and directing the activities of the honor guard, casket watch, pallbearers, rifle squad, bugler and flag presentation and will coordinate with the liaison officer.
- C. The department will maintain a roster of all departments sending personnel to the funeral and assist with accommodations.
- D. While the department recognizes the importance of providing the public, via the media, with accurate and complete information, and will involve the media during crisis situations, the department will withhold certain information concerning a member's serious injuries or death in the following circumstances:
 - 1. If a survivor has not been notified, or if the premature release of certain information could hamper the investigation into the incident;
 - 2. If an investigation is being conducted by an outside agency, the release of information by this department will be coordinated with their investigators.
- E. The department will arrange for the officer's personal belongings to be given to the family.
- F. The department liaison will fill out and submit the FBI's Analysis of Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (OMB Form #1110-0009) providing information on the incident

7.5.7 General Information

- A. Members of the department must remain sensitive to the needs of the survivors long after the member's death. Members of the Sheridan Police Department should continue to make contact with surviving family members, and attempt whenever possible to keep them included in the law enforcement community. This type of support after the trauma associated with the death of a police officer is critical to the eventual recovery for the family. The surviving family should always be made welcome at the police department as well as police functions. At any time the surviving family should ask for assistance, and if their requests are within our capabilities, every effort should be made to meet those particular needs.
- B. All personnel shall be given the opportunity to complete the confidential notification for serious injury/death form contained in the police department personnel file. The completion

of this form is optional. Completed forms will be sealed and kept secured. The Chief of Police or designee will only open the envelope in the event of a death or serious injury. Employees may use the form to designate persons they wish to notify their family and provide helpful information regarding their wishes in the event of their death or serious injury.

- C. The department will authorize mourning ribbons for a thirty day period for line of duty deaths.