

STANISLAUS CONSOLIDATED FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT  
POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

ARTICLE: C-80

SECTION: Operations

DATE: 4/23/13

SUPERCEDES: New

TITLE: **LINE OF DUTY DEATH**

**PURPOSE**

This procedure defines the necessary actions and responsibilities to be followed in the event of a line of duty death and can be escalated in the event of multiple deaths at an incident.

**DEFINITIONS**

Line of duty death: A death of any member of the Stanislaus Consolidated Fire Protection District while on duty, or while undergoing medical treatment for any injury or disease resulting from such duty. This also includes the death of a District member while traveling in connection with such duty or agency prescribed training.

Survivors: Immediate family members including spouse; all children (stepchildren and legally-adopted children); parents; siblings, significant others, and domestic partners.

**BATTALION CHIEF'S RESPONSIBILITIES**

In the event of a line of duty death, the on-duty Battalion Chief will insure that the following occurs:

1. Notification of the Fire Chief and Duty Fire Chief.
2. Secure the scene of the incident with the assistance of the Fire Investigator and Law Enforcement (Refer to investigation section of this document for further parameters).
3. All personnel will be put on gag orders that are, directly and indirectly, related to the incident scene. With the termination of the incident, no tailgate safety briefing should be done. Sequester crews for CISD and interviews.
4. Radio communications will be held to fire suppression activities **only**. At no time should information of the fallen be transmitted over the radio.
5. Direct Dispatch and PIO to withhold the release of personal data relating to the fallen or the death, pending notification of next-of-kin.
6. Have a Safety Officer respond to the scene, if not currently assigned.
7. Begin gathering all available information concerning the incident and circumstances leading to the death.

Article C-80, Section- Operations  
EFF Date: 11-13-13

8. Assign personnel from Human Resources to assemble as much personal data as possible concerning the fallen.
9. Establish a timeline of events.

### **PERSONAL EFFECTS OF THE FALLEN**

Personal effects shall include all property owned by the fallen member that is on District property at the time of the incident (non-safety related).

In the event of the death of a member, whether on or off duty, the following steps shall be followed in the gathering and disposition of his/her personal effects:

The Safety Officer will be assigned to secure the personal effects of the fallen member and deliver them to District Administration.

The fallen member's vehicle will be secured at the station and the keys forwarded with the personal effects.

Human Resources will conduct an inventory of the personal effects upon receipt and make a written record of all items.

- The next of kin will be given priority consideration to receive the property.
  - Care should be exercised in selecting a tactful time for delivery of the personal effects to the next of kin.
  - Documentation is **required** indicating the date, time, and location of acceptance by the District of the fallen members personal items. Documentation will then be placement in the fallen member's personnel file.
- ❖ Upon conclusion and final reporting of the investigation, the helmet of the fallen will be presented to the spouse or identified next of kin as a token of gratitude by the District for the service of the fallen to the District and the community.

### **NOTIFICATION OF NEXT OF KIN**

**Prompt and Judicious** notification of the next of kin is of the utmost importance in the case of a line of duty death. Notification shall be made by 3 official representatives (Notification Officers), one from the District, one from Local 3399, and a designated priest/chaplain. This will be done by personal contact, if at all possible. Before arrival, decide who will speak and what will be said.

If the next of kin is out of the area, the local jurisdiction may serve as the representative.

The official notification serves to insure the next of kin that the information is valid and to provide a knowledgeable accounting of the circumstances surrounding the death.

The Fire Chief is responsible for the notification of next of kin. He may, if in the best interest of the District, designate a representative to act on District behalf. In incidents involving multiple deaths or serious injuries, more than one representative should be assigned.

### **NOTIFICATION OFFICERS**

The Notification Officers are responsible for making the initial contact with the next of kin. This shall be done in person whenever possible. This official notification must be made before any details of the fallen are released to the news media.

An IAFF Fallen Firefighter Family Support Emergency Contact Information list will be completed by each firefighter and will be kept in the employees personnel file. This emergency contact list will only be used in the case of a line-of-duty death or serious injury.

The Notification Officers should be prepared to assist the next of kin with the immediate emotional trauma associated with the notification. A friend of the family or clergy member may be of valuable assistance at this time.

The Notification Officers should be prepared to stay with the next of kin until a family member or friend arrives, or as long as requested.

The Notification Officers, if needed, will also arrange for transportation of next of kin to and from the hospital or location of the fallen. All means will be explored if transport is needed i.e. Law Enforcement, District vehicle.

The Notification Officers shall:

1. Wear dress uniform with tie (if time permits).
2. Have an official District identification card in their possession.
3. Familiarize themselves with the circumstances and the necessary information concerning the fallen before making the notification.
4. Once the notification has been made, the Notification Officers will advise Dispatch and the PIO. An official announcement may then be made and details may be released to the news media.

Priority of Notifications:

1. Chief and all off-duty Chief Officers
2. Next of Kin
3. All District Employees
4. News media (prepared statement)
5. Elected officials

## 6. Fire Service Organizations

### **PROTECTION OF THE FALLEN**

At no time should the fallen be left alone. All efforts will be made to have a companion with the fallen from the time of the accident to interment. This will be a 24/7 assignment done voluntarily and administered by the Funeral Officer. The Funeral Officer will establish a list of volunteers and assign them shifts. If more personnel are needed, solicitation to neighboring departments is authorized. A service axe will be in the companion's possession and will be transferred at shift changes.

The day of church services and committal:

1. Church services - the companion will be posted, at the head, next to the fallen at parade rest with head down in mourning. The axe will be held by the head while the butt of the handle rests on the ground. The companion list will be used to establish a rotation of no longer than 10-15 minute during service.
2. Committal - leaving the church services, the last companion will then accompany the fallen to the final resting place, with axe in hand, and finish out the final shift. The companion will be posted by the fallen in the formation used at the church service.

Uniform: Church services and committal will be Class A only. All other shifts will be normal duty wear.

### **PERIOD OF MOURNING**

Following notification of the next of kin, a Dispatch and email announcement will be made informing all members of the line of duty death.

Example:

“The Stanislaus Consolidated Fire Protection District regrets to announce the death of (rank), (name) who died in the line of duty.” (Briefly state circumstances)

Immediately after the announcement, all flags on Fire stations and other District facilities will be lowered to half-staff and all badges will be shrouded. Flags will remain at half-staff and badge shrouds will be worn for 30 days after the funeral.

### **FAMILY LIAISON OFFICER**

The Fire Chief will appoint a Family Liaison Officer to act as representative in providing liaison with the next of kin. To provide a sense of continuity and familiarity for the surviving family, it

may be advantageous in some cases for one of the Notification Officers to assume the duties of the Family Liaison Officer. The Family Liaison Officer is a special staff assignment. As a direct representative of the Fire Chief, the Family Liaison Officer will receive the full cooperation of the entire District. Functionally, the Family Liaison Officer will report directly to the Fire Chief.

The Family Liaison Officer is responsible for the management of several important activities. The principal concern is the ongoing welfare of the next of kin. The Family Liaison Officer will render whatever assistance is necessary to settle the personal affairs of the fallen member and assist the next of kin and immediate family through the crisis. In incidents involving multiple deaths, more than one Family Liaison Officer should be assigned.

### **FAMILY LIAISON COMMITTEE**

The Family Liaison Officer also coordinates the activities of the Family Liaison Committee. The Family Liaison Committee will consist of a number of personnel assigned to handle specific aspects of the funeral arrangements and to assist the surviving family. These assignments will be made by the Fire Chief:

- Family Liaison Officer – The point of contact for the family of the fallen.
- Funeral Officer - Provides coordination and interaction with the funeral home, the minister, and church to arrange the funeral service, and the agency responsible for the cemetery.
- Procession Officer - Arranges all aspects of the funeral procession. Coordinates with law enforcement for procession route and street closure.
- Local 3399 Officer - Makes notification to and assists with activities of pallbearers, honorary pallbearers and ushers. Also assists with church and funeral commencements.
- Battalion Chief - Provides necessary support functions.

Other assignments will be made as needed by the Fire Chief at the request of the Family Liaison Officer.

It is important for the Family Liaison Committee to convene as soon as is practical after the line of duty death to begin making the necessary arrangements. This becomes especially important when the line of duty death occurs on or immediately prior to a weekend or holiday.

**In all cases, the level of District participation with the funeral arrangements will be at the discretion of the surviving family.** In incidents involving multiple deaths, planning funeral arrangements between the surviving families will require the assignment of more than one officer per position.

### **PALLBEARERS**

The pallbearers for a line of duty death will be eight members of the District with the family's approval. The family may request certain individuals to act as pallbearers. With that request, the Family Liaison Officer will make a list of family requested pallbearers and augment it with District personnel. A Commander, member of the color guard, will be assigned to lead the now formed Casket Team. With final approval of the family, the list will be presented to the Funeral Officer to coordinate the activities of the day with the Funeral Director.

### **CASKET TEAM**

Moving into the church:

1. The Casket Team enters the sanctuary following the clergy, carrying the casket. The Casket Team shall be in two columns of 4 pallbearers with a Casket Team Commander at the head centered between the two columns. The casket is placed onto the casket stand. *The casket carry march is a slowed half-step (15-inches)*
2. Prior to entering the sanctuary, the commander will have ascertained where the Casket Team is to be seated. Usually, this will be in the first or second pews, on the left of the center aisle.

Moving outside the Church to the Transport Engine:

1. The Casket Team will re-position with four pallbearers on either side of the casket, and the commander positioned at the rear of the casket as it exits the sanctuary (feet first).
2. The Casket Team will be led to the Transport Engine by the companion, who will carry the service axe at an angle close to the chest. Upon arriving at the Engine, the companion will march to a pre-determined location to side-rear of the Engine, facing it.

Placement of the Casket onto the Engine:

1. Two additional pallbearers will be standing at the position of attention facing inward toward each other on the tailboard of the Engine. The command **detail, HALT** will be given by the Casket Team Commander.
2. On the command **Center, FACE**, the pallbearers on either side of the casket will face each other (all commands given by the Commander will be at a vocal level just loud enough to be heard by the members of the Casket Team). On the command **Ready, DOWN**, the Casket Team will lower their heads in unison. The lowering of heads will be conducted in a three-count sequence, held in the down position for three seconds, and lifted again in a three-count sequence.

3. On the command **Ready, LIFT**, the Casket Team will lift the casket to the height of the Engine Bed. The Casket Team will pass the casket hand over hand up and onto the bed of the Engine, with the assistance of the tailboard members.
4. After placing the casket into the Engine bed, the two columns of pallbearers, without command, assume the position of attention, facing each other.
5. The Commander will salute the fallen.
6. Once the casket has been securely placed into the bed of the Engine, the two tailboard members will face away from the Engine bed and dismount the Engine in unison. They will then exit the Engine area through the open space between the two columns of pallbearers.
7. Upon the command **Center, FACE**, the pallbearers will face to the rear of the Engine, left or right respectively. This will be followed by the command fall out.
8. The companion will then take a seat in the engine and ride with the fallen to the burial site.

Arrival of the Engine at the Burial site:

1. Upon arriving at the burial site, the two tailboard members re-position on the tailboard of the Engine. The Casket Team marches up to the Engine, positioning the pallbearers in the same order as they left (facing each other). The Casket Team Commander positions off to the side of the Engine at a pre-determined spot however close enough to the pallbearers that verbal commands are as quiet as possible.
2. Prior to removing the casket, the Commander will salute the fallen. Upon the command **ready, LOWER**, the casket is lowered from the Engine in reverse order. Upon the command **sidestep, MARCH**, the pallbearers will take three sidesteps to the left or right respectively to allow sufficient space for the Casket Team Commander to position between the casket and the Engine.
3. Upon the command **center, FACE**, the pallbearers will face away from the Engine, left or right respectively. Upon the command **forward, MARCH**, the Casket Team will proceed to the gravesite.

***Care must be taken to ensure solid footing as the casket is carried onto and over the gravesite.***

4. Upon the command **detail, HALT**, the team will halt over the gravesite.

5. Upon the command **center, FACE**, the pallbearers will face toward the casket, left or right respectively. Upon the command **ready, DOWN**, the team will lower the casket on to the gravesite lowering device.

### **Flag, Axe, and Helmet Presentation**

6. The flag is folded by the pallbearers. Upon the completion of the flag folding, a predetermined pallbearer at the head of the casket wills **half-face** left or right respectively.
7. The Commander will salute the flag. The pallbearer will place the flag into the hands of the commander and then salute the flag.
8. The commander will take the necessary facing movement and walk to the Chief of the District.
9. The Chief of the District will salute the flag. The Commander will place the flag into the hands of the Chief and then salute the flag.
10. The Chief will take the necessary facing movement and walk to the pre-determined flag recipient and then salute the flag.
11. The helmet bearer, who is positioned at a pre-determined location will walk to and present the helmet to the helmet recipient.
12. The companion will then finish with presenting the axe to the axe recipient.

### **USHERS**

5-7 ushers will be used for church services and/or visitation. In the absence of family request for specific individuals to act as ushers, the Family Liaison Officer will leave the filling of these positions to the Local 3399 Officer. The Local 3399 Officer may use all neighboring departments' personnel to fill the necessary positions.

The Local 3399 Officer will coordinate the ushers' activities with the funeral director.

### **FUNERAL/PROCESSION UNIFORM**

Members attending the funeral in uniform shall wear Class B uniform, *at the least*, to include tie and badge shroud. Class A is **preferred**.



Members assigned to apparatus stationed along the procession route shall also be in Class B uniform to include tie and badge shroud. They will take a position near the apparatus and maintain an orderly, visible, and respectful formation until the entire procession has passed their position.

## **COLOR GUARD**

See Color Guard Procedure

## **INVESTIGATION**

In the event of a line of duty death or serious injury to one of our firefighters, the District must take immediate steps to ensure that the incident is accurately documented and investigated. This action is conducted to protect the interests of the deceased, the surviving family, and the District. It is also a mandate of State and Federal law.

### Primary Objectives

1. To determine the direct and indirect causal factors which resulted in a line of duty death, particularly those factors that could be used to prevent future occurrences of a similar nature, including:
  - a. Identifying inadequacies involving procedures, supervision, training, or performance.
  - b. Identifying situations that involve an unacceptable risk.
  - c. Identifying previously unknown or unanticipated hazards.
2. To ensure that the lessons learned from the investigation are effectively communicated to prevent future occurrences of a similar nature. (When appropriate, this should include dissemination of the information through fire service organization and professional publications.)

### Additional Objectives

3. To satisfy the requirements of the Public Safety Officer Benefits (PSOB) Program and other entitlements.
4. To identify potential areas of negligence and causal factors that could result in criminal prosecution or civil litigation.
5. To ensure that the incident and all related events are fully documented and evidence is preserved to provide for additional investigation or legal actions at a later date.
6. To provide factual information to assist those involved who are trying to understand the events they experienced.
7. To provide the information to other individuals and organizations that are involved in the cause of fire service occupational safety and health.

To accomplish this, there will be an Incident Death Investigation Team assembled and used for these emergencies. The team will be made up of:

1. SCFPD Chief Officer (appointed by the Fire Chief), Chairman
2. Local 3399 Representative
3. California State Fire Marshal's office Representative
4. RFA Investigator
5. ATF
6. Sheriff/Police Department Representative
7. At Large

The activation of the team should be called by the SCFPD Chief Officer in charge. The team should then meet at the site as soon as possible.

The initial collection of facts, preservation of evidence, and the appropriate agency notifications shall be the responsibility of the Incident Commander until the time the team can take over.

The following is a list of items that should be addressed:

1. Immediate Action

- a. Secure the scene. No unnecessary disturbing of the scene should take place. Remove all non-essential personnel.
- b. Impound all safety equipment that was used by our firefighter:
  - i. SCBA
  - ii. Turnouts
  - iii. Helmet
  - iv. Gloves
  - v. Any and all safety equipment that might have a bearing on the investigation.
  - vi. These items may need to be sent for testing.
  - vii. The approved evidence collection facility at 3705 Oakdale road, Modesto, will be utilized for storage of the equipment sited above.
- c. Have a video and digital picture record made of the site.

2. Secondary Action

- a. Arrange for the required autopsy that meets Public Safety Officers Benefit (PSOB) Program requirements.
- b. Obtain audio tapes of the incident.

- c. Request written transcripts with times of radio transmissions.
  - d. Impound all written forms used in the incident:
    - i. Incident Work Sheets
    - ii. Personnel Accountability Logs
  - e. Ensure all necessary agency notifications have been made:
    - i. OSHA
    - ii. Federal Emergency Management Association
    - iii. U.S. Fire Administration
    - iv. NIOSH
    - v. ATF (suspicious circumstances)
    - vi. California State Fire Marshal
    - vii. PSOB (one member of team needs to be designated liaison)
  - f. Obtain written statements from all individuals directly involved. It is preferred that these statements be completed prior to the release of members at the end of the shift. If this is impractical, the statements should be provided within twenty-four hours. These statements are confidential and are not to be reviewed by any individual, including Supervisors. These documents are to be sealed and turned over to the Incident Death Investigation Team.
  - g. Review all chronological reports.
  - h. Review all written statements.
  - i. Setup interview teams for all companies on the scene.
  - j. Interview all individuals on scene (tape for records)
  - k. Reconstruct the scene from statements.
  - l. Have diagrams and designs of fire scene for interviews.
  - m. Review the autopsy report (one is required).
  - n. Write the final report.
- ❖ If a firefighter's death is the result of an explosion, the Incident Death Investigation Team will be expanded with representatives from any agency that might have an expert quality or knowledge that might be useful.

## **BELL CEREMONY**

The men and women of today's fire service are confronted with a more dangerous work environment than ever before. We are forced to continually change our strategies and tactics to accomplish our tasks.

Our methods may change, but our goals remain the same as they were in the past, to save lives and to protect property, sometimes at a terrible cost. This is what we do, this is our chosen profession, this is the tradition of the fire fighter.

The fire service of today is ever changing, but is steeped in traditions 200 years old. One such tradition is the sound of a bell.

In the past, as fire fighters began their tour of duty, it was the bell that signaled the beginning of that day's shift. Throughout the day and night, each alarm was sounded by a bell, which summoned these brave souls to fight fires and to place their lives in jeopardy for the good of their fellow citizen. And when the fire was out and the alarm had come to an end, it was the bell that signaled to all the completion of that call. When a fire fighter had died in the line of duty, paying the supreme sacrifice, it was the mournful toll of the bell that solemnly announced a comrade's passing.

We utilize these traditions as symbols, which reflect honor and respect on those who have given so much and who have served so well. To symbolize the devotion that these brave souls had for their duty, a special signal of three rings, three times each, represents the end of our comrades' duties and that they will be returning to quarters. And so, to those who have selflessly given their lives for the good of their fellow man, their tasks completed, their duties well done, to our comrades, their last alarm, they are going home.

# **FIRE FIGHTER'S PRAYER**

**When I am called to duty, God  
Wherever flames may rage  
Give me strength to save a life  
Whatever be its age.**

**Let me embrace a little child  
Before it is too late  
Or save an older person from  
The horror of that fate.**

**Enable me to be alert  
And hear the weakest shout,  
And quickly and efficiently  
To put the fire out.**

**I want to fill my calling  
To give the best in me,  
To guard my friend and neighbor  
And protect their property.**

**And, if, according to your will,  
While on duty I must answer death's call;  
Bless with your protecting hand  
My family, one and all.**

Written By: Matthew Criswell

**X**  
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Michael Japrousi  
Deputy Chief