

Somerville Police Department 	TYPE: GENERAL ORDER		POLICY NUMBER: 122	VERSION: 3.00
	Subject: Death/Serious Injury Notification			
	Issuing Authority: Charles Femino Chief of Police		Signature: 	Effective Date: December 6, 2021
Accreditation Standards (6th Edition) 55.2.6		<input type="checkbox"/> New <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revised <input type="checkbox"/> Amended		
Revision & Reissued Dates:	8/8/14	6/22/2015		

Purpose

This policy applies to death, serious injury or serious illness notifications made by Somerville Police Officers to the general public. One of the more unpleasant duties of a police officer is making a notification that a person has been killed or seriously injured. Upon hearing tragic news, people react in different ways. Often, the persons receiving the news exhibit disbelief and have trouble comprehending what they are being told. Reactions include denial, anger, hysteria, and silence. Police officers may provide comfort and help the recipients obtain the support of other friends, family, and clergy. Persons with medical conditions may need the support of family members or paramedics. Death notifications involving young children or teenagers can be particularly traumatic, not only for the parents, but also for the officer making the notification. Police officers can be haunted for years with memories of delivering tragic notifications. A debriefing with a counselor may be appropriate in some cases and should be sought, if necessary.

Policy

It is the policy of the Somerville Police Department that the family of deceased, seriously injured, or seriously ill persons shall be promptly notified. [55.2.6]

Procedures

A. The following procedures should be followed

1. Positive identification of the victim must be confirmed before making a notification.
2. If the request is made by an outside agency or person unknown to the department, the legitimacy of the request must be confirmed. [55.2.6]

3. The employee receiving the request shall obtain the name of the agency, as well as the name of the person making the request. This information must be verified. (i.e., via callback to an official phone number affiliated with the place of origin of the request.)
4. The following information shall be recorded:
 - a. The identity and address or location of the person(s) to be notified.
 - b. The identity of the deceased, injured, or sick person.
 - c. Any other information or instructions from the requesting agency.
 - d. The nature of the notification including:
 - (1). Instruction to call a hospital or police department
 - (2). Death
 - (3). Injury
 - (4). Sickness

B. Other Considerations

1. Should the media prematurely obtain the deceased or injured person's name, the ranking officer may request that the information be withheld until proper notification of survivors has been made. If members of the family are in poor health and could possibly require medical attention, the Somerville Fire Department and paramedics should be alerted to stand-by in case of emergency. If time permits, a family friend, family member, or clergy member may be asked to accompany the officer (s) making the notification.

C. Making a Notification

1. The immediate family must be contacted before the name is released to the media.
2. Death or serious injury notifications should not be given over the telephone and notification should be made in person whenever possible.
3. It is critically important that the notifying officer ascertain as much information as possible before making the actual notification. The parties to be notified will be in an emotionally vulnerable position and will rely on the notifying officer(s) to handle said notification in an honest, compassionate and professional manner.

D. Locating the Persons to Be Notified

1. The address of the family should be identified.

2. If the family is not immediately available, an attempt should be made to identify their location.
3. If the family is out of the area, the local police with jurisdiction should be contacted and requested to make the notification.
4. If the request was made by another police agency and the family is not presently in Somerville, the requesting agency should be advised of the family's location, if known, so that arrangements for notification can be made with another police department.
5. These duties are to be handled by a supervisor. The supervisor will ascertain as much information as possible and confirm information to be accurate.

E. Making a Notification to Call or Go to a Hospital

1. A request of the immediate family to call or to go to a hospital should be made as soon as possible.
2. If the person is deceased, the officer should tell the family members.
3. If the person is alive, the family should be told the extent of injuries as known.
4. The family should be told which hospital their family member was taken.
5. The name of the hospital should be given in writing to the persons being notified, along with the telephone number for the hospital and the police station.
6. Transportation may be offered with the authorization of a supervisor, if the hospital is close by.
7. These notifications should be made in person whenever possible.

F. Making a Death Notification

1. Notification of a death should be made to the immediate family as soon as possible.
2. The actual notification should be made by at least two (2) officers when possible. One of the two officers shall be a superior officer. (i.e street supervisor)
3. Notification should never be made while standing outside. The notifying officers should attempt to gain entrance to the home, gather the appropriate persons, and clearly explain the situation.

4. In giving notification, officers should be as forthright as possible about the condition of the injured party and not make statements or use language that is ambiguous or that gives false hope.
5. The survivors should be told that the person is dead rather than using euphemistic expressions like “passed on” or “passed away.”
6. While notifying officers should attempt to maintain composure in order to better provide assistance to members of the surviving family, they should recognize that a show of emotion is a natural expression of anguish and empathy and is not a sign of weakness.
7. Notifying officers should be aware of and prepared for a range of possible reactions from surviving family members. Hysteria, shock, physical violence, anger, rage, silence, stoicism, fainting, and screaming are some of the more common reactions.
8. Notifying officers should be prepared to give whatever solace and comfort they deem appropriate, but should avoid trite phrases or clichés that, although intended to provide comfort, may make the situation worse.
9. In many cases, the best reaction of the notifying team is simply to stand by quietly until members of the family have regained composure and are prepared to ask for additional information.
10. Officers Should be Prepared to:
 1. Provide accurate and confirmed information regarding the circumstances surrounding the person’s death. Notifying officer’s should be mindful that “too little” information is worse than none at all.
 2. Give instructions to the family about where the deceased person was taken.
 3. Provide contact information for other agencies.
 4. Provide transportation so that distraught family members do not operate a motor vehicle.
 5. Officer’s making notification shall take as much time as necessary to appropriately handle the situation.