



# GENERAL ORDER OPS-01 DEATH NOTIFICATIONS

EFFECTIVE AUGUST 26, 2011

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This General Order contains the following numbered sections:

- I. POLICY
- II. PROCEDURE
- III. CANCELLATION

## **I. POLICY**

Members of the Howard County Department of Police (HCPD) are often called upon to inform families of the sudden and unexpected death of one or more members of their family. This news will alter the course of the entire family. It is tragic personal news that must be told quickly, concisely, yet with compassion and understanding. Each situation will be unique, yet each will carry a certain similarity.

## **II. PROCEDURE**

### A. Duties and Responsibilities of Sworn Officers Making Personal Notification<sup>1</sup>

1. Make the notification as soon as possible. Emergency contact information may be obtained via MVA records through NCIC/Dashboard. Delay increases the possibility that the family will learn of the death through other means.
2. Members should not make the notification alone. Another member of the HCPD, a neighbor, family clergy, physician, a member of the Mobile Crisis Team or Departmental Chaplain should accompany the notifying member.
3. Where possible, develop advance knowledge of the person to be notified. It is beneficial to know whether the person may have a medical or mental condition to be considered prior to notification.
4. Be prepared for reaction. Some may faint or become hysterical, exhibit signs of severe depression or suicide, or may become aggressive and accuse the member of lying.
5. Members should describe the situation in exact concise terms. Avoid words or phrases which might be misinterpreted. "Fatally injured", "mortally injured", etc., might give the impression that the victim is still alive.
6. Do not inform minor children; find a responsible adult member of the family.
7. Do not recommend a specific funeral home.
8. Do not interject or interfere with religious beliefs or feeling.
9. Notifying members should not leave the family alone after notification until they have composed themselves. Members may stand quietly aside after making the notification unless duty or the situation requires otherwise. Unnecessary attempts at conversation should be avoided.

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<sup>1</sup> CALEA 55.2.6

10. Members may divulge where, when, and how death occurred. Members will not comment on who may have been at fault, nor describe injuries.
11. In general, members should not transport the family to the location of the body. Members may transport relatives short distances, if no other transportation is available to them.

B. Telephone Notifications

1. Telephone inquiries should be forwarded to the officer or investigator handling the case, or in their absence, a Watch Commander or area supervisor. Telephone notifications should only be made when the deceased's relative calls, and will be made by sworn members only. Telephone notifications within Howard County will never be initiated by the HCPD.
2. Death notifications out of Howard County will be made by the police agency serving the jurisdiction in which the family to be notified resides. Contact with the foreign agency will be made by telephone or teletype requesting notification and confirmation. The notification will be made in accordance with the notifying agency's procedures.
3. The response to an inquiring family member will be accurate, prompt, and compassionate. The responding member will offer any assistance, such as calling a neighbor, friends, relatives or having a police unit respond to assist the family.

III. **CANCELLATION**

This General Order cancels and replaces General Order 95-05 dated April 30, 1995.

AUTHORITY:

  
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William J. McMahon  
Chief of Police