



GENERAL ORDER OPS-01 DEATH, SERIOUS INJURY, AND SERIOUS ILLNESS NOTIFICATIONS

EFFECTIVE SEPTEMBER 1, 2021

This General Order contains the following numbered sections:

- I. POLICY
- II. NOTIFICATION PROCEDURE
- III. HOWARD COUNTY DETENTION CENTER DEATH NOTIFICATIONS
- IV. CANCELLATION

I. POLICY

Members of the Howard County Department of Police (HCPD) are often called upon to inform citizens of the sudden and unexpected death, serious injury, or serious illness of one or more members of their family. It is tragic personal news that must be told quickly and concisely, yet with compassion and understanding.¹

II. NOTIFICATION PROCEDURE

- A. Members shall coordinate with Howard County General Hospital (HCGH) when seriously injured persons are transported to the hospital or death of a person HCPD is involved in through a call for service occurs at the hospital.
- B. Sworn Officers Making Personal Notification²
 - 1. Make the notification as soon as possible. Emergency contact information may be obtained via Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) records through NCIC/Dashboard. Delay increases the possibility that the family will learn of the event through other means.
 - 2. A supervisor should accompany the member making notification. If it does not delay making notification, a member of the Mobile Crisis Team (MCT) or a Departmental Chaplain may accompany the notifying member and supervisor.
 - 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 wounded, 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 feelings.

¹ CALEA 55.2.6

² CALEA 55.2.6

9. Notifying members should not leave the family alone after notification until the family have composed themselves. Members may stand quietly aside after making the notification unless duty or the situation requires otherwise.
10. Members may divulge where, when, and how death or injury occurred. Members will not comment on who may have been at fault, nor describe injuries.
11. 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.

C. Telephone Notifications

1. Telephone notifications within Howard County will never be initiated by the HCPD.
2. Telephone notifications should only be made when the deceased or injured person's relative calls and will be made by sworn members only.
3. Telephone inquiries should be forwarded to the officer or investigator handling the case, or a Watch Commander or area supervisor in their absence.
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.

D. Death notifications outside of Howard County

1. Members of the Traffic Enforcement Section (TES) may make in-person death notifications for traffic fatalities when the family resides within 45 minutes of Howard County. Exceptions made be made with supervisory approval based on unforeseen circumstances.
2. All other death notifications will be made by the police agency serving the jurisdiction in which the family to be notified resides. Contact with the outside 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.

III. HOWARD COUNTY DETENTION CENTER DEATH NOTIFICATIONS

- A. When a person in custody at the Howard County Detention Center (HCDC) dies, the HCPD shall make notification to the next of kin.
- B. HCDC will contact the Watch Commander with the next of kin information.
 1. The Watch Commander will ensure a sworn officer makes notification following the in-person or out-of-jurisdiction procedures in this General Order, as appropriate.
 2. If a member of the Major Crimes Bureau is investigating the incident, that member should make the next of kin notification following the procedures detailed in this General Order.

IV. **CANCELLATION**

This General Order cancels and replaces General Order OPS-01, Death Notifications, dated August 26, 2011.

AUTHORITY:



Lisa D. Myers
Chief of Police