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Chief of Police

# ALBANY, NEW YORK

## POLICE DEPARTMENT

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### NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES GENERAL ORDER NO: 3.1.20

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<b>Issuing Authority:</b> Chief Eric Hawkins	<b>Page:</b> 1 of 4

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this policy is to establish procedures for the notification of next-of-kin of deceased, seriously injured, or seriously ill persons.

**POLICY:** It is the policy of the Albany Police Department to notify next-of- kin of individuals when necessary, and to ensure that such notifications are carried out in a prompt and considerate manner.

#### I. SUDDEN/UNATTENDED DEATHS

- A. Sudden or unattended death calls may originate in many forms. (e.g., EMS Responding-Unknown, Code 35, etc.).
- B. The following guidelines shall be followed when investigating any type of sudden or unattended death calls:
  1. Call for a supervisor to respond to the scene and begin a preliminary investigation.
  2. Observe all conditions, events, and remarks made at the scene.
  3. Locate and interview the complainant and any witnesses.
  4. Preserve the scene for evidence;
    - a. Instruct the medical technicians that aiding the victim is a first priority but they must also protect the scene.
    - b. Any disturbances must be noted and recorded to ensure a thorough investigation.
    - c. Only authorized personnel (commanding officers, detectives, the coroner, etc.) are allowed access to a crime scene.
  5. Keep a crime scene log (Supplemental Report) and record such items as names, time in, and time out of persons entering the scene.
  6. If, after arrival, EMS declares that the subject is deceased, the supervisor in charge of the scene shall contact the Criminal Investigations Unit (CIU) or Children and Family Services Unit (CFSU) supervisor, as appropriate, and notify him/her of the circumstances surrounding the death.

- a. If the death appears suspicious or cannot be determined, the detective supervisor shall arrange for CIU or CFSU detectives to respond to the scene for further investigation.
    - i. The detective supervisor shall also arrange for Forensic Investigations Unit (FIU) detectives to respond to the scene, if necessary.
    - ii. Detectives shall be responsible for further interviewing the complainant, witnesses, and/or suspects.
    - iii. The detective supervisor shall contact Communications by telephone, whenever possible, and have Communications contact the coroner and have them to respond to the scene.
    - iv. If there is no detective supervisor available, the on-scene supervisor shall become responsible for these duties.
  - b. If the death does not appear suspicious, the supervisor in charge of the scene shall arrange for the County Coroner to respond to the scene.
    - i. The on-scene supervisor shall contact Communications by telephone, whenever possible, and have Communications contact the coroner and have them to respond to the scene.
    - ii. If the family has already arranged for a funeral home to take care of the services, and the death does not appear suspicious, the family shall be allowed to contact the funeral home, in place of the County coroner.
7. The first few hours after a homicide are crucial in the investigation of the crime. A chain of events leading to the crime must be established if a successful investigation is to be completed. Anything in the crime scene area of a physical nature when removed, touched, or otherwise changed will break the chain of evidence and perhaps hinder the entire investigation. All rules of evidence must apply even if there is a suspect in custody. Officers shall comply with the following:
- a. Treat all sudden deaths like homicides, until proven otherwise.
  - b. Preserve the scene.
  - c. Remain with the body until relieved by a supervisor or coroner.
8. In all cases of apparent death, the ranking officer is in charge of the scene until the coroner is notified and responds to the scene.
- a. An officer shall stay with the body until relieved.
  - b. It is the duty of the officer to guard the body of the deceased.
  - c. An officer must go to the hospital with the victim and shall not lose sight of the body until or unless relieved by the coroner or superior officer.
  - d. In a death case, the coroner is in charge of the investigation and the police officer is subject to their authority.

**C. Report and Preliminary Investigation:**

- 1. The following information shall be obtained and a Standardized Incident Report

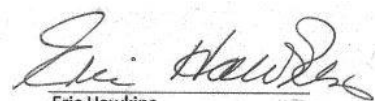
(SIR) completed:

- a. All pertinent information concerning the victim;
- b. The names and addresses of witnesses and any information concerning the nature of the incident;
- c. The manner in which the scene was initially found; location of the body, evidence relevant to cause of death, any weapons found at the scene;
- d. Regarding apparent suicides; any drugs, poisons, or suicide notes found at the scene. Note despondency whenever indicated;
- e. The means of transport to the hospital morgue, or funeral home that took charge of the body;
- f. The name of the doctor or coroner who pronounced the victim and the exact time of pronouncement; the results of any autopsy and the doctor performing; and
- g. Any other pertinent information related to the death.

## **II. NOTIFYING NEXT OF KIN**

- A. The following procedures shall be followed when notifying next of kin of deceased, seriously injured, or seriously ill persons:
  1. Whenever making a notification, officers should be aware that the information they are conveying is potentially traumatic. An understanding of some practical steps should be taken into account prior to speaking to the intended relative, survivor, etc. The notifying officer must use his/her best judgment in these matters.
  2. The message shall be conveyed in person. Do not contact directly via telephone; a physical presence is usually more reliable, as well as personable.
    - a. Officers conveying the message should be physically present to answer any questions using the available information.
    - b. Being present also allows the officer(s) to appropriately comfort and/or provide assistance should an emergency situation develop (e.g., shock, hysteria, etc.).
    - c. If there is no response at an address, leave an incident form with instructions to contact the proper patrol unit/division either at that address or with a neighbor.
    - d. Should the intended message receiver live in another jurisdiction, arrange to convey the message through another agency/person. Encourage, don't demand, that this other agency/person make a personal notification.
    - e. Do not solicit/receive notification information via the radio communications. If a dispatcher begins relaying this information via radio, advise the dispatcher to stop and then call the dispatcher via telephone for this information.
  3. Provide notification as soon as possible, but be certain the information being relayed is appropriate and correct.
    - a. Be sure of the victim(s) identity. Determine the next of kin and gather critical information (e.g., circumstances of death, the hospital the victim was taken to, etc.).
    - b. Determine if other family members should be present at the notification.

2. If possible, two (2) officers should be present to convey the message.
3. The message should be conveyed in plain language.
  - a. Officer(s) should clearly identify themselves and request to speak inside the residence, not out on the doorstep.
  - b. Relay the message directly, in plain and simple terms. The presence of the officer(s) has already denoted a serious problem.
  - c. Calmly advise the relative or survivor of the message, giving any available details. Calmly and appropriately answer any other questions the relative or survivor may have, using the available information.
  - d. Refer to the victim (deceased/injured) by name. If the victim is deceased, do not refer to “the body.” Use the proper name; this keeps a “humane” aspect to the notification.
4. Important resources that any officer brings to a notification are “presence” and “compassion.”
  - a. Accept the relative or survivor’s emotions and attempt to supply a degree of comfort. An officer who appears cold and unfeeling may cause more damage than is necessary.
  - b. Plan to take time to provide information, support, and direction. Never simply notify and then leave.
  - c. Do not take any personal items belonging to the injured/deceased along when making a notification. The relative or survivor needs to deal with the situation step by step, in his or her own way.
  - d. An officer should offer to contact another person/relative to assist the survivor during this difficult time.
5. After completing the message, the officer(s) should leave their names and a work phone number where they can be reached should other questions arise.
6. Making a notification in a workplace setting:
  - a. Contact the involved employees’ appropriate supervisor.
  - b. A private room or area should be supplied for the purpose of completing a notification.
  - c. The workplace may have an Employee’s Assistance Program in effect with an established protocol for this purpose. If no program exists, the aforementioned guidelines shall apply.
7. Making a notification in a hospital setting:
  - a. Consult with a hospital employee (e.g., nurse, doctor, etc.) regarding general procedures or protocol.
  - b. The aforementioned principles shall also be applied, as is appropriate for the situation.

  
Eric Hawkins  
Chief of Police