
**NEVADA COUNTY
SHERIFF'S OFFICE**



CORONER'S DIRECTIVE

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Effective Date 05/30/99
2/6/18

SUBJECT **DEATH NOTIFICATION**

POLICY To provide the deputy coroner with general guidelines in the notification of next-of-kin of the deceased person

PURPOSE Establish a standard procedure for notification of next-of-kin on coroner cases, and deal practically with one aspect of law enforcement's stress/death notification.

CODE REFERENCE

CASE LAW

DEFINITIONS

PROCEDURE

A. Death Notification

1. After positive identification of the deceased, unless there are extenuating circumstances, death notifications shall be made to the appropriate family member **IN PERSON**, and not via telephone. If next-of-kin live out of the immediate area, a teletype, fax or email shall be sent to the coroner, medical examiner's office, or law enforcement agency in that jurisdiction briefing them on the details, and requesting they attempt to notify the appropriate family member **IN PERSON**. For the death of a foreign national, the closest consulate or embassy shall be notified of the death and any given any next-of-kin information.

B. Determination of Next-of-Kin

1. Wife or husband (married or separated – NOT divorced);
2. Son and/or daughter;
3. Mother and/or father;

4. Adult brother and/or sister;
5. Any other family member or person who has acquired the right to control the disposition of the remains;
6. Public Administrator

The closest living relative is determined to be the next-of-kin. They are to make all arrangements or they must appoint, in writing, someone else to carry out these arrangements.

C. Information to be conveyed to Next-of-Kin

1. The next-of-kin are to make arrangements with the mortuary/crematory of their choice.
2. Never obtain death information (identifying information of the decedent, driver's license returns or license plate returns) over the police radio. If the radio operator starts to do this, ask him/her to stop. Have the radio operator call you on the telephone or vice-versa.
3. Obtain as much information as possible (what, when, where, and sometimes, if possible, how). Disregard the "why" of the incident. You should not become involved in that during the notification. A simple and appropriate answer to "why" is, "I don't know."
4. Before you break off contact with your source of information, make sure you have positive identification of the victim. Nothing is more inept than to be making the notification and have the supposed victim walk into the room, call on the phone, or later contact the grief-stricken party. They may be elated at the moment, but later their elation will turn to bitterness for you and the department because of the trauma that you have caused.
5. Operating vehicle emergency lights and flashers is inappropriate. Keep a low profile when you park in front of the residence.
6. Never carry a personal item of the victim's with you. Leave all of those items at the hospital, the sheriff's office, or in your car. A simple notepad with the name or description written down will suffice.
7. Attempt to get inside the residence before you deliver the message. If a medical emergency develops behind a closed door, you'll never know about it.
8. Avoid notification by telephone; the consequences could be too great.
9. If possible, never go alone. Either a chaplain, or friend of the victim (preferably a relative) can help break the news more easily. If friends or relatives are unavailable, take another officer with you. Most people would rather hear the news from a relative than a deputy.

10. Try to assess the stability of the individual to whom the news must be delivered. If, in the officer's judgment, the person may be so shocked by the death notice that hospital treatment would be required, the officer should attempt to make some arrangements.
11. Relate the message straightforward using a direct approach, i.e., "Your son has been involved in an accident. He has been killed." There is no way to soften the initial blow of this reality. Avoid jargon such as, "Your daughter was injured, fatally." The message should initially be very clear leaving no room for false hope as the word injured may allow.
12. If the family breaks down, try to console them as well as you can. Almost any behavior is possible (anger, denial, questions, et cetera). Physical violence is always a possibility. This possibility underscores the need for two persons going to such calls.
13. Beware of the variety of reactions (some faint and others become hysterical). Assess the situation. Read the nonverbal cues and try to anticipate needs, e.g., a place to sit or some water. A "quick read" of the living environment may give you valuable hints to possible reactions.
14. If the person is alone, ask if there is a friend whom he/she can call, or you could call to come and stay with him/her for a while. Men are just as emotional as women and need the comfort and understanding of a friend. If at all possible, stay until someone arrives.
15. It is usually better to be empathetic than sympathetic. The grieving person usually does not want sympathy from strangers. Feeling sorry for that person is not as effective as feeling with the person. Some shared feelings may be most meaningful. Under no circumstances should an officer's behavior give cause for false hope.
16. Be specific but tactful; try to avoid police jargon when explaining the situation, i.e., words such as "fatality", "vehicular flow", and "11-44", et cetera are out of place. Use plain language. Do not obscure the message and do not pass the buck. Center on meeting immediate needs. Do not become involved in a discussion of possible future actions.
17. Be prepared to spend a few minutes with the family. Do not drop the news and then turn and walk out. Try to assess the situation. The family may have a question or two as soon as the initial shock can be handled. If questioned, be as honest about the situation as you can. They will let you know verbally or emotionally that they are handling it and will, most of the time, cue you in some way that they wish to be alone.