

GENERAL ORDER

April 2016

Immediately

III-19

Distribution: All Employees

Subject: **DEATH AND SERIOUS INJURY SPECIAL PROCEDURES**

Index as: Death Investigations
Medical Examiner
Notification of Next of Kin

Property, Handling of Victim's
Transportation of Deceased Persons

Accreditation Standards: 55.2.6, 61.2.1, 61.2.2, 61.2.3, and 81.2.11

Cross Reference: G.O. III-14, Evidence

Replaces: G.O. III-19, Death and Serious Injury Special Procedures (November 01, 2014)

This Order consists of the following sections:

- I. Purpose
- II. Supervisor Responsibility
- III. Notification of Next of Kin
- IV. Disposition of Property
- V. Transportation of Deceased Persons

I. PURPOSE

Investigations of incidents resulting in death, or serious life-threatening illness or injuries to persons require that Officers perform certain functions not usually required in other investigations. These matters require tact and an understanding of the needs of the next of kin and special investigative and property disposition procedures.

II. SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITY

A. A supervisor shall respond to all deaths.

B. In cases of serious injury, the supervisor shall ensure, whenever possible, emergency aid is administered in order to preserve life.

C. The supervisor shall:

- 1. Immediately notify the Investigative Services Bureau (ISB) of all homicides and deaths that are suspicious in nature.
- 2. Ensure every reasonable effort is made to notify the next of kin.
- 3. Assist the investigating Officer in the coordination of support services.
- 4. Assist the investigating Officer in determining what property, if any, is to be impounded and in securing the location where the death occurred.

III. NOTIFICATION OF NEXT OF KIN

A. The task of notifying the next of kin of seriously ill, seriously injured, or deceased persons often becomes the responsibility of police personnel.

1. When required, notification should be carried out promptly and in a compassionate manner.

2. The assistance of a police chaplain, other clergy, or other support persons may be considered if readily available.

B. The investigating or assigned Officer shall make every reasonable effort to complete required notification to the next of kin during their tour of duty. The Officer shall not leave notification to the hospital or other authorities.

C. The Officer shall note in the police report the name of the person notified, relationship, and the time the notification was made.

D. Within the City of St. Petersburg

1. The investigating/assigned Officer should make all notifications in person whenever practical. However, if this is not practical, the Officer should contact the Emergency Communications Center and request another Officer make the notification.

2. The Officer making the notification should have as much information as possible to carry out the notification in a professional and considerate manner. When possible, contact between Officers related to the investigation and the Emergency Communications Center should be via telephone.

3. The Officer making the notification should remain and render additional assistance to the next of kin when necessary, including contact with clergy, Fire-Rescue, doctors or other relatives. Transportation of the next of kin to a local hospital where the victim is being treated may be requested from a supervisor, if appropriate.

E. Outside the City of St. Petersburg

1. Notification to the next of kin outside the City, for an incident occurring within the City, should be done through the police agency having jurisdiction where the next of kin can be located.

2. The requesting Officer should call and/or have a teletype/computer message sent to the respective agency, providing as much information as possible.

3. The Officer should request the outside agency notify a specific point of contact within the St. Petersburg Police Department, after notification to the next-of-kin has been made.

F. Making Notification for other Law Enforcement Agencies

1. Requests for next-of-kin notification from other law enforcement agencies should be received by the Emergency Communications Center via teletype/computer.

2. The Officer assigned to make the notification should be requested to contact the Emergency Communications Center and be given the notification message over the telephone.

3. The Officer should be given as much information as possible to ensure the notification is made in a professional and considerate manner.

G. Incomplete Notifications

1. The Officer shall note in the police report all efforts to complete the notification, including names, addresses, telephone numbers of persons spoken with and the times attempted.

2. All death investigation reports, except those involving a traffic fatality, shall be forwarded to the Investigative Services Bureau (ISB) for review and/or completion. Follow-up investigation and notification of next of kin shall be the responsibility of ISB.

3. In a traffic fatality, follow-up investigation and notification will be the responsibility of the Uniform Services Bureau (USB) Traffic Section.

IV. DISPOSITION OF PROPERTY

A. Any property which may be evidence or contraband should be carefully handled and marked before being submitted to the Property and Evidence Unit, as required by existing procedures.

B. The property of the deceased should be turned over to an immediate family member at the incident scene whenever possible. An immediate family member is defined as: a spouse, parent, adult son or daughter, sibling, grandparent or adult grandchild.

C. If no immediate family member is available to accept custody, the investigating Officer shall impound the property which was in the immediate control of the deceased prior to death. The Officer may conduct a cursory search of plain view areas for small items of value including, but not limited to, cash, watches, jewelry, keys, wallet or purse and documents useful in settling the estate, such as a will.

D. Security of Real and Movable Property

1. The investigating Officer shall secure the premises and any vehicles or outbuildings of a deceased person, if that property would be left unattended upon the Officer's departure.

2. If the deceased resided in an apartment, hotel or motel room, it is the responsibility of the landlord to take charge of the deceased's belongings. However, the investigating Officer shall impound personal items as indicated in this Order.

3. If the death occurs at or away from the deceased person's residence, the investigating Officer shall make a reasonable effort to ensure the deceased person's residence is secured.

4. The investigating Officer shall impound the residence key and leave a receipt as described in this Order.

5. If the death occurred in a rental vehicle, it is the leasee's responsibility to take charge of the deceased's belongings. However, the investigating Officer shall impound personal items as indicated in this Order.

E. Impound Procedure

1. When no immediate family member is available to accept custody of property and the items are impounded, a *Property Deposit Receipt* shall be completed.

a. The original shall be forwarded to the Records and Identification Division to be attached to the police report and filed.

2. If the investigation is in the home of the deceased, a copy shall be left in a conspicuous location prior to securing the residence.

3. If the death occurred away from the deceased's residence, a copy shall be left with the deceased's body.

4. If the death occurred in a hotel, motel, apartment building or a vehicle, a copy shall be left with the landlord, lessee, or in the vehicle.

F. Storage and Release of Impounded Property

1. Property secured by the Police Department becomes the Estate of the Deceased.
2. The Property and Evidence custodian shall release a deceased person's property to the personal representative named in the will, upon proof that the will has been filed with the Probate Court, presentation of Letters of Administration, or with a Court Order.
3. Other than as set forth in this Order, release of deceased's property will be coordinated with the Legal Division.
4. The assigned detective or Traffic Section Officer shall assist the Property and Evidence custodian, when necessary, in the release of the property.

V. TRANSPORTATION OF DECEASED PERSONS

A. Routine Death Investigations

1. When a death has occurred without an attending physician caring for the patient, and it is obvious no criminal investigation is required, the Officer shall immediately contact the Medical Examiner's Office. The Medical Examiner's Office will arrange for transportation of the body to the Medical Examiner's facility for completion of the certification of the cause of death.

2. If the decedent has an attending physician (the physician may be treating the patient but not be present at the time of death) who will sign the *Death Certificate*, a funeral home/mortuary service of the family's choice may be summoned to remove the body.

a. After removal of the body, the investigating Officer shall complete a [J:\Forms\MedicalExaminer\Attended Death Form.doc](#) before the end of the shift, and fax (727-582-6820) or email (d6cremations@gmail.com) it to the Medical Examiner's Office.

b. The *Attended Death Report Form* and the local fax machine record of receipt, or the email reply, from the Medical Examiner's Office shall be submitted to the Records Division to be attached to the *Incident Report*.

c. If no family is present to select a funeral home/mortuary service, the Pinellas County Indigent Burial Contract Provider shall be contacted through the Medical Examiner's Office to remove the body pending a decision by the decedent's family.

3. In all cases, the investigating Officer shall remain at the scene until the body is removed.

B. Procedures in Emergency Situations

1. When immediate removal of a body is desirable for the safety of an Officer or other citizens, the Officer at the scene may determine that emergency removal is required. A supervisor shall be notified of the emergency need to remove the body. Emergency situations may include a disaster, civil disorder, a threat of escalating violence in a hostile environment or another emergent situation.

2. When an Officer has determined emergency removal is necessary, the Officer shall contact the Medical Examiner's Office as soon as practical and indicate the nature of the incident and that emergency removal of the body by ambulance has been authorized. The Officer will request an ambulance through the Emergency Communications Center.

3. When emergency removal has been requested, Bayfront Health St Petersburg (BHSP) has agreed to assist with short-term storage of a deceased person while awaiting transfer of the body to the Medical Examiner's Office.

a. Prior to bringing the body into the BHSP Morgue, the Officer will check in at the main entrance and ask for a Laboratory Medical Assistant to log in the body. The Laboratory Assistant will record: date and time body received, name of deceased (or alias), and initials of person making the entry. The St. Petersburg Police Department will be entered as the location.

b. BHSP Security will be contacted to meet and accompany the Officer and the deceased, via the south entrance loading dock, to the lower level morgue. The Officer shall remain with the body at the morgue until arrangements are made for transport to the Medical Examiner's Office.

c. When arrangements for transport to the Medical Examiner's Office have been made, a Laboratory Assistant will be notified and the sign-out procedure followed. The Officer will sign out as the person taking the body. A Security

Officer will accompany the Police Officer and body out of the hospital via the entry route.

d. The Officer shall then turn the deceased over to the Medical Examiner's Office, noting the time and person receiving the body in the police report.

Anthony Holloway
Chief of Police