

LINE OF DUTY DEATH POLICY

A-080

DATE: 2-23-2006

A line of duty death (LODD) or serious injury is a tragic and very difficult event for any fire department to appropriately respond to. The affected agency involved in a LODD or serious injury event will experience raw emotions, a disturbance of normal operations, a sense of grief, bereavement and will face very difficult days ahead. The procedures below are designed to assist the Union Vale Fire District (UVFD) in the event of a line of duty death or serious injury.

This LODD/ Serious Injury procedure will be utilized in the event of any Union Vale Fire District member is injured or killed while on duty. In addition, many of the enclosed procedures and/or suggestions can be well adapted to any non-line of duty death or injury or other similar event(s).

It should be noted that these guidelines were created to support the Fire District, the surviving family and others affected by this event. As with any procedures, they should be adapted and remain flexible to the individual needs each event will create.

There are 3 variations of a line of duty death, each having their own response needs:

1. Union Vale Fire District Member dies at the scene of the incident
2. Union Vale Fire District Member dies at the hospital upon arrival
3. Union Vale Fire District Member is alive upon arrival at the hospital but dies of those injuries days or weeks after the incident

Non-LODD event:

1. Union Vale Fire District Member dies of un-related reasons (natural causes)

The primary goals of these procedures will include:

- Tradition, Honor, Respect given to the surviving family and department
- Emergency Contact Form completion for every Union Vale Fire District member
- Proper death notification training for Union Vale Fire District officers
- Suggested funeral and/or memorial tasks
- Communication strategies (internal and external)
- Immediate support needs for the surviving family of the injured or deceased
- Immediate support needs for all Union Vale Fire District members
- Post funeral support for the family of the injured or deceased
- Post funeral support for Union Vale Fire District members
- To address the resulting stress and grief with proper strategies and tactics
- Public Safety Officers Benefit, local, state and regional program and other benefit resources for surviving family

When a line of duty death (LODD) or serious injury has occurred involving any member of Union Vale Fire District, the command officer at the scene shall follow the set actions in this Union Vale Fire District Procedure, notifying immediately the following people:

1. Union Vale Fire District Board of Commissioners
2. Union Vale Fire District Chief officers
3. Union Vale Fire Company line officers
4. Union Vale Fire Company Chaplain
5. Local CISM resources

From the Zero Hour forward:

1. Secure and restrict entry into LODD scene (especially if the event is deemed suspicious)
2. All equipment involved needs to be secured and chain of evidence/custody established
3. Map out who needs to be called, in what sequence (UVFD officers, Commissioners, UVFD LODD response team, SPFC chaplain, UVFD PSOB Liaison) – see above
4. Notify remaining on-duty members not at the scene or on duty – under the direction of the UVFD Chief officers (for message content and timing)
5. Convene LODD Response team by next morning to review roles/responsibilities, tasks to be assigned
6. Union Vale Fire District Public Information Officer should coordinate and create the appropriate press releases and distribute them per Union Vale Fire District standard procedures, only after the family notification has been completed
7. Union Vale Fire District Public Information Officer should schedule a press conference as soon as possible
8. Consider use of mutual aid for the next 24-48 hours to assist with operational needs
9. Within first 24 hours, convene a departmental meeting for any/all UVFD members to communicate facts about the event to control any rumors, all follow-up details, resources available, etc.

Confidentiality

- Once **details and facts** of the LODD or injury have been gathered/confirmed, and if the surviving family has not been notified previously by the investigating police agency, three representatives of the Union Vale Fire District: Chief, Chaplain and Commissioner (part of the UVFD Go Team) shall accompany the police agency to assist in the family notification. *See the individuals ECF for additional notification information*
- At no time whatsoever, should the injured/deceased persons name be used over any radio channel
- Once adequate **details and facts** have been gathered and confirmed, an appropriate communication shall be sent out to all remaining Union Vale Fire District membership

Union Vale Fire District Death Notification guidelines:

- Be ABSOLUTELY sure the correct identification of the deceased/injured has been completed.
- Name of the deceased/injured shall not be released until all possible attempts have been exhausted to notify the immediate family first.
- The individual's Emergency Contact Form (ECF) will need to be accessed following the established UVFD ECF access plan. The contents of the individuals ECF shall be reviewed for any special situations the Notification team should know
- Never one person, should be minimally two Union Vale Fire District representatives and one police agency officer
- Should be in some type of recognized Union Vale Fire District uniform.
- Never on the doorstep. Ask to go into the house and sit down

- Use plain language to explain what has happened. As well, use the deceased's first name at all times. **Try not to overwhelm the family with too many details at first.**
- Consider staging an out of sight EMS unit. People within the house may have underlying medical conditions that may be aggravated by the tragic news

Additional notification issues:

- Offer to make needed phone calls.
- Arrange for a childcare if needed.
- A “senior” member of Union Vale Fire District to be assigned to the family to act as the Family Liaison to assist them with interactions with Union Vale Fire District and other agencies. Check the individuals ECF for further related details
- If the notification will be done at the receiving hospital, consider working with the hospital media relations and security personnel to set up waiting areas for the family and other Union Vale Fire District members that are involved and for any press that should be expected. Make all attempts to keep the media away from these waiting areas within the hospital.
- Use of the state-wide teletype system (NYSPIN, EMPIRE) should be considered

Family Support:

- UVFD Family Liaison representative should assist in the funeral arrangements, offering such as honor guards at funeral home, communications to and from Union Vale Fire District officers, transportation needs for the day of the funeral. (See Funeral Details section for further information)
- ***Above all, family needs to come first. The Family Liaison position is not a decision making position.*** Empower the family to make as many decisions as possible
- The Family Liaison should be expected to be “on call” 24 hours/day during the LODD event
- Family Liaison shall give to the family all his/her contact numbers, cell phone, pager, etc
- Obtain and review the Public Safety Officers Benefit (PSOB & PSEOA) program and give this to the family (888-744-6513). Follow-up on these programs will be critical post-funeral
- Assist in housing and transportation arrangements for the surviving family
- Contact local law enforcement agencies to have a patrol car to do property checks on a regular basis of the surviving family's residence including any other local immediate family homes, especially when the residence will be empty (calling hours, funeral, etc.)
- Family Liaison should start a list of all phone calls, cards, donations and other expressions of sympathy to assist the family in the acknowledgement of these.
- Suggest and assist with the establishment of a memorial fund on behalf of the family at a local bank to coordinate the processing of all donations sent to the family

Departmental Support:

- Use of all internal (*Union Vale Fire Company Chaplain*) and external CISM resources should be utilized first
- UVFD officers should be on the lookout for the typical signs/symptoms of critical incident stress:

1000 ‘mile stare’, anger, irritability, survivors guilt, responsibility guilt, changes in people’s normal manner, grief, sadness, increased alcohol or caffeine consumption, decreased attention, confusion, emotional outbursts, etc.

- Convene a LODD departmental meeting within the first 24 hours to advise all surviving departmental members of:
 1. What has happened
 2. Address any/all rumors generated by the department and/or media
 3. What is being done for the family
 4. What support mechanisms are in place for the surviving department
 5. Identify the UVFD LODD Response Team and support/CISM resources available (defusing, debriefing, grief support, etc.)
 6. Advise the members of the sequence of events (wake, funeral, etc.) will be for the next 48+ hours
 7. Advise the members of path for all related communications will be for updated information
 8. The UVFD PIO must be in attendance for this meeting
 9. All statements to the press shall be handled by either the UVFD District Chief or the UVFD PIO
 10. Absolutely no press or other media shall be a part of this meeting whatsoever
 11. ***The purpose of this meeting is not to be a critique or operational review of the event itself***

Funeral Preparations:

- Once the final details of the funeral or memorial arrangements have been confirmed with the Family Liaison, Funeral Liaison and Cemetery Liaison, the information will then be communicated to all Union Vale Fire District members
- Communications to be delivered by home receivers, pagers, e-mail and phone tree activities.
- If the funeral is to be held within a 250 mile radius of Verbank, NY, the following items will be offered to the deceased’s family at their discretion:
 - 1) Minimally, the Chief shall be in attendance, with any costs incurred to be covered by the Fire District pending the District’s approval. All Union Vale Fire District membership will also be encouraged to attend.
 - 2) All those in attendance will be in full dress uniform.
 - 3) An offer to use Union Vale Fire District vehicles will be suggested to be part of the official funeral procession.
 - 4) An offer to provide uniformed Union Vale Fire District members as honor guards to be stationed at the foot and head of the casket during any calling hours. In addition, Union Vale Fire District members to serve as pallbearers and ushers at the discretion of the family.

- 5) The UVFD Board of Commissioners shall retain standing authorization to purchase flowers or other memorial donations to an organization of the family's choice. The Family Liaison shall obtain these details, see the individual's ECF for further details.

CISM/Peer Support requirements:

- Union Vale Fire District Chief shall immediately activate any local CISM resources
- Use of the Dutchess County Critical Incident Stress Reduction Team shall be implemented by contacting them through MERS Control (845-486-2081)
- Make arrangements for a defusing to be completed within 4-6 hours of the incident, inviting any Union Vale Fire District **membership directly involved with the incident and any other emergency services directly involved (Fire, EMS, law Enforcement, etc.)**
- Arrange for grief support for the remaining Union Vale Fire District membership within 4-6 hours of the incident
- Arrange for a full debriefing for all Union Vale Fire District membership within 24-48 hours *after* the funeral or memorial services (*this may require two groups*)
- Long term support requirements (grief counseling, EAP, professional mental health services) to be determined as needs and requests arise by working with the Western New York Stress Reduction Team

LODD / Serious Injury Resources

1. Western New York Stress Reduction Team 716-898-3696
2. National Fallen Firefighters Memorial 301-447-1365 www.firehero.org
3. Public Safety Officers Benefits Program 888-744-6513
4. International Critical Incident Stress Foundation 410-750-9600
www.icisf.org
5. American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress 631-543-2217
www.aaets.org
6. NIOSH 1-800-356-4674
7. OSHA 1- 800-321-OSHA
8. International Association of Firefighters 202-737-8484
9. United States Fire Administration 301-447-1000

Serious Injury Addendum:

In the event of a serious injury of any Union Vale Fire District member, the following procedures shall be incorporated with the above procedures:

- Notify the injured immediate family using the information from the Union Vale Fire District Emergency Contact Form
- Minimally, two senior Union Vale Fire District Officers should respond to the receiving hospital to assist with any support needs of the injured's family
- Once the condition of the injured has been confirmed, that information will be shared with all Union Vale Fire District members, with direct input from the family for the amount of information to be released

- Union Vale Fire District PIO should coordinate and create the appropriate press releases and distribute them to all local media per Union Vale Fire District standard procedures
- Work on keeping all media well under control to help protect the injured member, their family and others involved in the event
- For Union Vale Fire District member support, follow the established Peer Support guidelines within the LODD procedures above