

# La Plata Police Department – General Order

	Title: <b>Death/Serious Injury Notifications</b>	Order #: <b>663</b>	
	Effective Date: November 20, 2014	Review Date:	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New	<input type="checkbox"/> Amends	
Approved by: <b>Chief Carl Schinner</b>		CALEA 5 <sup>th</sup> Edition	
CALEA Standard: 55.2.6		Pages: 3	

**01 PURPOSE:** To establish policy and procedures to be followed regarding death, injury and serious illness notifications.

**02 POLICY:** It is the policy of the La Plata Police Department to make death, injury and serious illness notifications in a timely and professional manner.

**03 PROCEDURE:**

**A.** The message will be delivered as quickly and professionally as possible.

**B.** When delivering a death notification, officers should, when possible, follow the below listed principles:

1. Make the notification in person:

a. It is very important to provide the survivor with a human presence or “presence of compassion” during an extremely stressful time. Notifiers who are present can help if the survivor has a dangerous shock reaction which is not at all uncommon, and they can help the survivor move through this difficult moment.

b. Arrange notification in person even if the survivor lives far away. This can be achieved by contacting the local law enforcement agency in the survivor’s home area to deliver the notification in person.

c. Death notification information shall not be transmitted over the police radio. Obtain the information over the telephone, or it might leak out to family through the media or private parties listening to the police radio.

2. Make the notification in a timely manner:

a. Provide notification as soon as possible, but be absolutely sure, first, that there is positive identification of the victim. Notify next-of-kin and others who live in the same household, including roommates and unmarried partners.

b. Obtain as much detail as possible about the circumstances of the death, about health considerations concerning the survivors to be notified, and whether other people are likely to be present at the notification.

3. Make the notification in pairs:

a. Ideally, the persons would be a law enforcement officer, in uniform, and a clergy person, Mental Health Professional, or close friend. A female/male team often is advantageous

- b. Before they arrive, the notifying team should decide who will speak, what will be said, how much can be said.
4. Use plain language:
- a. Notifiers should clearly identify themselves, present their credentials, if not in uniform, and ask to come into the home.
  - b. Notifications should never be made at the doorstep.
  - c. Be sure you are speaking to the right person. Officers may offer to tell children separately if that is desired by the adult survivor.
  - d. Relay the message directly and in plain language.
  - e. Survivors usually are served best by telling them directly what happened. The presence of the team already has alerted them of a problem.
  - f. Inform the survivor of the death, speaking slowly and carefully giving any details that are available. Then calmly answer any questions the survivor may have.
  - g. Begin by saying, "I have some very bad news to tell you" or a similar statement. This gives the survivor an important moment to prepare for the shock.
  - h. Then, avoid vague expressions such as "Sally was lost" or "passed away." Examples of plain language include: "your daughter was in a car crash and she was killed." "Your husband was shot today and he died." "Your father had a heart attack at his work place and he died."
- i. Call the victim by name, rather than "the body."
  - j. Patiently answer any questions about the cause of death, the location of the deceased's body, how the deceased's body will be released and transported to a funeral home, and whether an autopsy will be performed. If you don't know the answer to a question, don't be afraid to say so. Offer to get back to the survivor when more information is available, and be sure to follow through.
  - k. There are few consoling words that survivors find helpful, but it is always appropriate to say, "I am sorry this happened."
5. Make the notification with compassion:
- a. Remember: Your presence and compassion are the most important resources you bring to the death notification.
  - b. Never try to talk survivors out of their grief or offer false hope.
  - c. Plan to take time to provide information, support and direction. Never simply notify and leave.

- d. Do not take a victim's personal items with you at the time of notification. Survivors often need time, even days, before accepting the victim's belongings. Eventually, survivors will want all items. Tell survivors how to recover items if they are in the custody of law enforcement officials.
- e. A victim's belongings should never be delivered in a trash bag.
- f. Offer to call a friend or family member who will come to support the survivor, and stay until the support person arrives.
- g. Offer to help contact others who must be notified, until a support person arrives to help with this duty.
- h. Survivors may have a hard time remembering what is done and said, so write down for them the names of all who were contacted.
- i. Inform the survivor of any chance to view the deceased's body.
- j. If you accompany the survivor to view the deceased's body, explain the condition of the deceased. Be sure to inform them of any restrictions or contact that may apply if there are forensic concerns.

- C. When delivering a message of serious injury or illness, the officer:
  - 1. Collect as much information as possible, about the circumstances of the injury or illness, the location of the involved individual, and the condition or extent of the injury.
  - 2. Shall be truthful and direct when delivering the information and never provide false hope.
  - 3. Shall attempt to make notification in person, if unable to do so, make contact by telephone.
  - 4. May request the assistance of the MHF in delivering the message.

D. The notification procedure outlined above apply to both those requests initiated locally and those initiated by an allied agency.

**04 LINE-OF-DUTY DEATH**

**NOTIFICATIONS:** See Order 425-Line-of-Duty Death.

**05 NOTIFICATION TO NEXT-OF-KIN**

**OF FOREIGN NATIONALS:** If an officer needs to make a next-of-kin notification for a foreign national who has not relatives in the United States (U.S.). The officer shall call the local embassy or the U.S. Department of State for assistance.