



Sample Funeral Protocol for Suicide in the absence of Off-Duty Death Protocol

Overall Recommendation

It is recommended that a death by suicide follow the same protocols as any other off-duty death with the exception of a murder-suicide, those under felonious criminal investigation, or performing actions reflecting criminal intent/behavior at the time of death. The purpose of the funeral is to honor the life and service of the officer and offer comfort and closure to the family. This should not be overshadowed by personal bias or societal stigma. It is further recommended that suicide be specified in current off-duty death protocol so there is no room for interpretation or modification. Suicide death is especially traumatic for the families and often, they are witness to the death or the immediate aftermath, extreme care should be taking with family members and others on scene.

Classification of Events

Death of a sworn employee by suicide.

Debriefing

It is recommended that each department's personnel involved in the conduct of funerals meet with the committee of the impacted agency and debrief the event for evaluation purposes to determine if any changes to policy or practice are appropriate.

Mourning Ribbon / Flag Protocol

It is recommended that a standard protocol be established for the display of mourning ribbons and flags and that a uniform time period be established for the resumption of normal operations. In the absence of a set protocol, mourning bands should be optional for officers who wish to wear them. Flag protocol should be same as any other off-duty death.

Critical Injury / Death and Funeral Notice

It is recommended that a standard form "Critical Injury / Death and Funeral Notice" be established for release relative to the critical injury or death of an employee. This should be the same notification that is filled out for line of duty or other deaths and notification should follow this same policy.

Notifications

Upon confirming the facts and circumstances of the death agency-specific notifications should be made.

Given that the identity of the involved employee will be withheld pending notification of next of kin, it is highly recommended that on-duty personnel be advised to interrupt their duties and contact their own families to notify them that they are not the involved party. Employees should be advised not to release the names of any parties actually involved in the incident.

Recommended Primary Notification

- Agency Head
- Chaplain
- Next of Kin
 - The notification to the next of kin should, whenever possible, be made in person, by one of equal or greater rank than the decedent and in the company of a Chaplain.
 - The notifier should be well informed regarding the circumstances surrounding the death and should freely impart that information to the decedent's family.
 - The notifier, or other suitable person, shall remain with the decedent's family until the arrival of a suitable assisting person so as not to leave the family unattended during this critical period.
 - The notifier should obtain the name of the employee preferred by the family to act in their behalf as Family Liaison Officer.
- On-duty personnel
- Psychologist

Funeral Protocols

Funeral protocol reserved for sworn personnel whose death is not the result of a traumatic, duty-related event should be followed. It denotes a reduced level of military- style honors but suitable to the service of the officer. This is typically confined to a rifle salute, ceremonial flag folding and presentation and TAPS.

Family should be consulted and offered assistance with the funeral with the understanding of the limitations of an off-duty death. Family should guide the type of funeral, attendees, and public coverage of the event. With a high-profile suicide, families are often overwhelmed with the media attention and they should be prohibited from the funeral if the family makes this request.

Officers wishing to attend the funeral in uniform should be allowed to do so. If the off-duty death policy allows attendance at the funeral without use of personal time, this must apply to suicide. No perception of penalty because of the method of death should be made to the family or fellow officers.

Family Support

Family should be offered a liaison who can advise them as to their benefits, or lack thereof, in

the event of a suicide. Many families believe they will be provided line of death duty honors and benefits and it is important that they immediately understand how soon they will lose benefits and income.

A list of local support resources should be made available to the family that is specific to suicide loss. It is important for families to understand they are not alone and certainly not the first to experience this type of death. Families can be immediately connected to another family further out from a suicide by contacting Sharonda Calderon at sharonda@bluehelp.org.

Personal items removed from the home and locker clean out should follow the same protocol for any other off-duty death and the family should be notified of this process immediately.

Any and all policies in place for off-duty death should be adhered to for suicide and suicide should be included in the text of the existing protocol. It is best all information be provided in writing to the family as soon as possible.

If the officer died at home, assistance should be offered to clean the premises and return it to a habitable condition as soon as possible. Care should be taken when investigating the death, so the family does not feel as though they were responsible or complicit in the death in any way.

Department Support

Debriefing should occur immediately, a list of local support resources specific to suicide loss should be made available to all officers and, follow-up should occur at 30, 60 and 90 days from date of incident. Peer support from an outside agency should be brought in, it is not recommended that internal peer support be used because of the close ties to the event.

On scene personnel should be offered immediate assistance and debriefing. This is a traumatic event for all officers in the department and should be treated with the same care as any other incident.

For support or information, please feel free to contact Bill Zito or Jeffrey McGill.

Bill@bluehelp.org

Jeff@bluehelp.org