

DEATH BENEFITS

(No. 16 August 1990)

1033

The following are specific actions to be taken by departmental personnel upon the death of an employee:

- Unit** Immediately notify the region office when the death of an active or retired employee occurs and provide the following information:
- Name of employee
 - Date and cause of death
 - Name and address of spouse/next-of-kin and designees
 - Length of state service
 - Complete a "Request for Delivery of Warrants of a Deceased Employee" ([Form AO-13](#)) or a "Request for Funds and Property of a Decedent" (Form PO-62). Salary warrants cannot be released until this form is received.
 - Determine if the deceased employee was travelling on official state business at the time of death.
 - Contact the departmental Accounting Office for instructions regarding reimbursement to the next-of-kin for transportation expenses to a funeral home.
 - Arrange for the return of the deceased employee's identification card and any state-issued weapon prior to release of final salary warrants. The employee's badge may be retained by the family for funeral services and returned to the department following the services.
 - If the employee died in the line of duty or had three or more years of service with CAL FIRE, the employee's badge and a certificate of service may be presented to the next-of-kin. Before presentation, the badge will have an "in-memoriam" ribbon affixed.
 - Notify PERS Benefit Division in Sacramento. PERS requires the following information on the death of an active or retired member:
 - Name of decedent.

- Social security number.
- Date of birth.
- Occupation.
- Employer.
- Health insurance plan.
- The PERS retirement number.
- The date of death, cause, and whether death occurred on the job or off duty.
- Name, address, telephone number, and relationship of the person (wife, child, parent, etc.) who provided notice of death.
- Name, address, and telephone number of surviving spouse, dependent children (including their ages), other next-of-kin, or other person who will be settling the estate.

When applicable, notify the employee organization, life insurance company represented by payroll deduction, SCIF, and the Division of Industrial Safety.

Contact the spouse or immediate family of the deceased and express the sympathy of CAL FIRE and prepare a condolence letter from the unit. Offer the following information:

- Advise next-of-kin of all available benefits/assistance.
- Offer assistance in arranging the funeral memorial service and/or burial details.
- Ascertain any special wishes the family may have regarding CAL FIRE participation in the funeral or other memorial events.

- If appropriate, arrange for an honor guard if desired by the family. If appropriate, arrange for a delegation of officers from Sacramento, the region, and the unit to attend the funeral. The chairperson of any delegation will be the region chief or designee. That person will coordinate attendance and other details such as an appropriate floral tribute or other form of remembrance as requested by the family. Transportation arrangements for the family will also be the chairperson's responsibility.
- If the death occurred while the employee was in the line of duty, the department may authorize an honor guard and incur reasonable costs for representation at the funeral. Good judgment should be used as to the number of personnel attending the funeral at state expense.
- If the death occurred while the employee was off duty or retired, normally there would be no expenditure of state funds for funeral services or for personnel attending the funeral on state time.

**Region Office
or
Headquarters
Chief**

Notify the Sacramento Fire Protection section to send out an electronic message to all units. When a peace officer/ firefighter dies in the line of duty, CAL FIRE flags will be flown at half staff until after the funeral.

Prepare a suggested letter of condolence to the spouse/next-of-kin for the Director's signature. It should be immediately telecopied to the attention of the Personnel Officer. Request Issuance of warrants by the Controller upon receipt of the separation documents. Warrants are issued in the name of the deceased employee only. They can only be released to a person who is 18 years of age or older. They will be sent to the unit or the designee/claimant. A cover letter will be sent listing the payments that have been made.

Confirm that the ECC has notified other agencies, regions, and units of the death according to established ECC procedures.

**Sacramento
Personnel
Services**

Prepare the final draft of the condolence letter for the Director's signature and forward a copy to the Governor's office with the cause of death and length of service of the deceased typed at the bottom. This will initiate a letter of condolence from the Governor.

IMMINENT DEATH/TERMINAL ILLNESS

1033.1

(No. 16 August 1990)

Certain actions can be taken to help a spouse or family member determine PERS benefits if any employee becomes incapacitated and death is imminent. Imminent death or terminal illness implies that the member is not expected to live for more than 60 days. This also applies in cases where death may not necessarily be imminent but competency to act in one's own behalf may become impaired, thereby jeopardizing desired retirement action.

- Should an employee become incapacitated and death is presumed to follow in the near future, it may be beneficial to retire the employee prior to death. To help make this determination, PERS should be notified. Provide PERS with the employee's name, social security number, and number of dependents. PERS will determine how much the employee has paid into the retirement system and compare preretirement death benefits with those obtainable by other retirement options (disability or service retirement). With this information, the employee and/or next-of-kin can determine whether it would be economically desirable for the employee to be retired prior to death.
- Employee-initiated retirement would be effective as of the date requested by the employee, providing a waiver of sick leave is approved. (Note: Regardless of who initiates the retirement, a waiver of sick leave is very important if the presumptive death is near.) If an M.D. certifies that the employee is of sound mind, retirement papers can be initiated immediately.
- When the employee is not of sound mind and is unable to act on his/her own behalf, a conservator must be designated.

Due to the complexity of the choices and decisions, it is imperative that the PERS Benefits Division Emergency Retirement Officer be contacted for assistance in all cases of terminal illness.

PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS' BENEFITS ACT (PSOB)

1033.2

(No. 31 October 1993)

The Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) administers the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program, which provides death benefits to eligible survivors of state and local public safety officers who die as the "direct" and proximate result of personal injury sustained in the line of duty.

A CAL FIRE public safety officer is a person serving in an official capacity as a law enforcement officer or as a firefighter. Volunteer firefighters are also covered if they are designated members of legally organized volunteer fire departments.

Claimants should deal directly with the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, in Washington, D.C.

When reporting the death of a public safety officer, the victim's name and address, and the telephone number of the employing agency must be provided. The federal agency staff will immediately telephone the employing agency and obtain all information required to initiate a claim.

NOTE: In cases of smoke inhalation or heart attack with probable cause of smoke inhalation, a toxicological blood examination must be performed as soon as possible to establish the level of carbon monoxide (CO) in the victim's blood. Exact results should be recorded. Any amount of CO present and the time the results were obtained after death are necessary to determine eligibility for benefits.

SOCIAL SECURITY

1033.3

(No. 31 October 1993)

Coverage under the federal Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance Program (Social Security) may be available either through the deceased's state employment or through prior or secondary employment. The local Social Security Office should be contacted by the next-of-kin whenever an employee who has worked under Social Security dies so that a determination regarding eligibility may be made.

ACCIDENTAL DEATH
(No. 31 October 1993)

1033.4

The insurance company will need verification of the accidental cause. The following information should be gathered while waiting for the actual forms from the insurance carrier:

- Statements from eye witnesses.
- A statement from a physician or coroner concerning the accidental nature of the cause of death.
- A certified copy of the death certificate and the coroner's final investigation report.
- A newspaper account of the accident, if one is available.
- An autopsy report, if done, including the toxicology report for PSOB.

**PROCEDURE FOR DEATH
OR SERIOUS INJURY NOTIFICATION**
(No. 90 August 2002)

1033.5

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection recognizes that in the fulfillment of our mission serious injury and death may occur. It is the policy of this Department that whenever notification of serious injury or death is necessary that it be accomplished with compassion and professionalism.

We recognize that this is a very sensitive and difficult task. The intent of this policy and procedure is to provide a concise and orderly guide.

**NOTIFICATION FOR DEATH OF EMPLOYEE
-- DEATH ON DUTY/LINE OF DUTY**
(No. 90 August 2002)

1033.5.1

Next of Kin

Death notification to next of kin is to be accomplished as soon as possible. The following death notification procedure shall be executed to ensure the most compassionate and professional notification possible:

Confirm that **all information** on the deceased and the next of kin family are accurate:

- Name of deceased.
- Age of deceased.
- Cause of death.
- Location of death.
- Contact name of individual for further information (i.e., Coroner, funeral home, etc.)
- The name of the next of kin to be notified.
- The physical address of next of kin.
- Phone number of next of kin.
- Pre-event condition of the family (i.e., health of the family, stability, family support, local place of worship, clergy support, out of state next of kin). Divorce, separation, custody issues, and location of children are all important issues that should be known.

Two-Person Detail

Preferably, a Chief Officer and a Chaplain will be dispatched as a team for the notification

- Identify rendezvous location and meeting time.
- Review information.
 - Name of deceased.
 - Cause of death.
 - All other appropriate details.
- Determine who will make the actual notification. Discuss and rehearse how the notification will be presented.
- At the residence or place of notification:
 - Before approaching the residence, make a phone call or have the ECC call to inform the family that department personnel will be at the door in a few minutes, especially at night. *(See example below.)

Example:

"Sir/Madam - some CAL FIRE personnel will be at your door in a few minutes and they need to talk to you."

NOTE: ECC staff should not answer any questions the family may have. Say, "The CAL FIRE personnel will answer your questions."

- At the door, introductions should be made including rank. Ask for the individual who is to receive notification and request entrance.

- **DO NOT MAKE NOTIFICATION AT THE DOOR.**

- Move to a comfortable room in the house and have all family members seated, if possible.
- Message needs to be related using direct words that will not allow for confusion or misunderstanding.

Example:

"Your husband, Phillip, has been killed." Deliver with a soft tone of voice; be tactful, compassionate, and use plain language without superfluous details.

NOTE: Anticipate any type of reaction from hysteria, catatonia, to even a violent reaction against the messenger. It is at this time that knowledge of any pre-existing health or emotional conditions is critical.

- Information shared with the family is to be limited to the facts alone. Do not share any personal opinions regarding the incident.
 - Do not rush off. Assist in making phone calls. Notify family clergy. Identify what type of support systems would be available for the family. Do not leave until you are sure support for the family is there and the situation is stable.
 - Being quiet is not a bad thing. Remember ministry of presence; you do not always have to say something.
 - Inform the family that a Family Liaison Officer will be assigned and ask if they have any preferences.
- Notify the local district office of the Division of Occupational Safety and Health (CAL/OSHA) by telephone within 24 hours, if the death is the result of a work-related accident. (Telephone numbers of the district offices are shown on the notice "Safety and Health Protection on the Job" that is required to be posted in each office.)
 - Obtain copies of any investigative reports regarding the death prepared by the Department or any allied agency; these may be required when filing for some benefits or insurance.

NOTIFICATION TO A CAL FIRE EMPLOYEE OF FAMILY MEMBER DEATH

1033.5.2

(No. 90 August 2002)

- Ensure that Unit Chief of the employee is advised of the situation.
- Collect all pertinent information about the death:
 - Name of deceased.
 - Age of deceased.
 - Cause of death.
 - Location of death.
- Confirm the location of CAL FIRE employee:
 - Incident (Division, Branch, etc.).
 - Station.
 - Employee's supervisor.
- Make contact with the employee's supervisor and advise him/her of the situation.
- Establish the two-person detail to make notification.

Example:

Employee's supervisor and a chaplain, Unit Chief and Chaplain, etc.

- Arrange with Unit and/or Incident for return of CAL FIRE employee to his/her home.
- Arrange for family support (i.e., chaplain, family clergy, and close friends.)

NOTE: The family and/or employee may be a considerable distance apart depending on the employee's duty assignment or incident location.

PERSONNEL SECTION NOTIFICATIONS

1033.5.3

(No. 90 August 2002)

Upon receipt of the death notification information, the Personnel Section makes the following notifications (as applicable):

- PERS.
- Life insurance paid by payroll deduction (except private policies paid through employee associations).
- SCIF forms (SCIF 3067 and 3301 must be submitted within 24 hours).
- U.S. Department of Labor (when death involved a crime against the U.S.).
- Office of the Governor.

Clearance of Pay and State Property

- Salary warrants or expense reimbursements are issued in the employee's name only. If the deceased has designated an individual to receive final warrants, the Department can release warrants with appropriate endorsement working, to the designee. Personnel Services Section will determine if a STD 243 is on file.
 - If STD 243 is on file, the Transactions Unit will forward PO-13 "Request for Delivery of a Deceased Employee," with explanatory information and the warrant. When completed, one copy of the form is returned to Personnel.
 - If STD 243 is not on file, Treasury Form 31 (PO-62) will be sent by Personnel with the warrant for delivery to the next of kin beneficiary.
- Confirm that all state property has been received and a certifying Electronic Mail or memorandum sheet has been sent accordingly. The employee exit checklist must be received by Personnel Section prior to the final warrant being released.
- Forward to the Personnel Services Section the final Attendance Report and STD 634.
- When the final warrant is received, deliver to the appropriate personnel.
- Arrange for presentation to the next of kin.

Funeral Coordination Activity

- Communicate with the Family Liaison Officer concerning the extent of Departmental participation.

- Refer to [Funeral Guide](#):
 - Exhibit 3A, Procedures to be Followed on the Death of an Employee.
 - Exhibit 3B, Assisting the Family of a Deceased Employee (Provides information ways regarding possible methods the Family Liaison Officer may assist the family in some of the arrangements the family will need to consider.
- Factual descriptions of state provided benefits are contained in the following exhibits:
 - Exhibit 3C, Uniformed Employee Service Connected Death Benefit.
 - Exhibit 3D, Non-Uniformed Employee Benefits for Death Off Duty.
 - Exhibit 3E, Uniformed and Non-Uniformed Employee Benefits for Death Off Duty.
 - Exhibit 3F, Retired Employee Death Benefits.
- After the family has arranged the services, the Funeral officer should contact the funeral director concerning the Department's involvement as Honor Guards, pallbearers (CAL FIRE and/or others,) the number of seats to be reserved for CAL FIRE (including chief officers) and other fire and enforcement agencies.

[\(see next section\)](#)

[\(see HB Table of Contents\)](#)

[\(see Forms or Forms Samples\)](#)